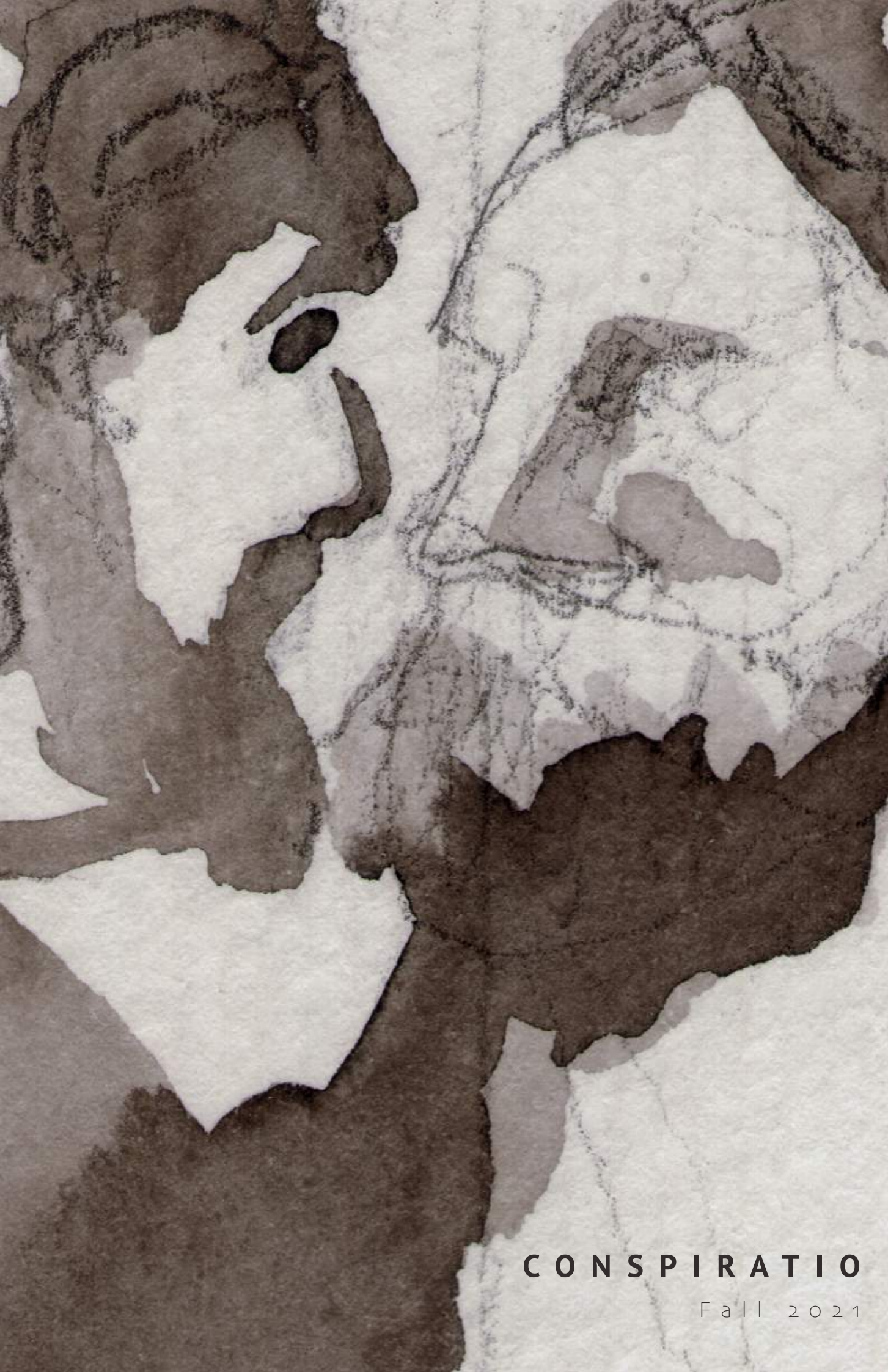

CONSPIRATIO

Fall 2021

Periodical for
Thinking After Ivan Illich

Cover Image
Isabelle Cedotti interprets
a painting by Giovanni Serodine

Editor
Sajay Samuel

Printed in
Brazil

the quest for truth cannot thrive
outside the nourishment
of mutual trust

Ivan Illich

ABOUT CONSPIRATIO

Conspiratio is neither an academic journal nor a popular magazine. Each issue of Conspiratio comprises essays, thematic articles, book reviews, and occasional translations of texts on or by Illich. All that appears in its pages typifies what Illich called "research by people", which names disciplined studies conducted by those attempting to beautify their own lives by being less dependent, in thought and deed, on the market and the state. For this reason, research by people is open to public debate and contestation. Though conducted through the medium of the written word, the periodical invokes the hoped-for intimacy of con-spiration. For an orientation, consult two essays by Illich: "Research by People" & "The Cultivation of Conspiracy".

Conspiratio encourages contributions from everyone wanting to participate in thinking after Ivan Illich. All contributions are expected to reveal a degree of familiarity with Illich's thought and to engage it in a thoughtful way. All are free to submit essays, book reviews, or translations for publication. Articles contributing to the theme of each issue should be made in response to the call for papers at www.thinkingafterivanillich.net

Conspiratio is published twice a year, in Fall and Spring. It will be available to be read online, downloaded as a pdf file, or received as a printed booklet (for a nominal printing and postage fee). To be apprised of current and forthcoming issues, please register at conspiratio@afterillich.net

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EDITOR'S LETTER

It was in a modest apartment in Fiesole which overlooks the city of Florence, nestled in the valley below that, in early June 2001, a few friends, a generation younger than Ivan Illich, were discussing, in his presence, what might constitute the key words to his thought. Unsurprisingly, he did not have much to say. But as the conversation proceeded, it became increasingly clear to us that a more sustained effort was needed to both see the building blocks and to uncover the foundations of his thought. It was in the context of that longer term project that I first heard the phrase 'Thinking after Illich' pronounced by Silja Samerski. She noted that the German nach has the same two senses that 'after' has in English. Nach not only means positional or temporal succession, as in B which comes after A or tomorrow which follows today. It also means to follow in the footsteps of, to mimic the style of, to think in the wake of.

The wake of a ship is formed when its hull cuts through the water. The turbulent waters that spread away from the ship in the shape of an inverted V circumscribe the calm waters of the wake. The concepts Illich forged are honed to razor-sharpness and anchored in enduring felt realities. They cut cleanly through the muddle of confused categories and are immune to faddish scientific abstractions. An example or two may suffice. Illich argues that 'transport' is as different from 'transit' as cars and trains are from pedestrians and cyclists. To think that private cars are categorically different from public buses is to imagine that a difference in the method of financing a technology alters its capacity

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Samuel, S. Editor's Letter. Conspiratio, Fall 2021, p.8-11.

to disable humans. If 'work' entails expending effort in exchange for cash, then 'shadow work' is the term Illich coins to describe the unpaid effort needed to make paid commodities useful. In that sense, helping Johnny with his homework is not 'quality family time' but rather the shadow work imposed by education. Such concepts and many more remain to be fully grasped and to be better used to understand our times.

It is for this reason that *Conspiratio* is offered as a periodical for thinking after Ivan Illich. Illich saw so deeply into the present that he seemed to anticipate what became obvious only much later. Perhaps it is for this reason that the philosopher Gorgio Agamben recently suggested that the hour of Illich's legibility has only now arrived. And there is some warrant for this suggestion. A surge of interest in Illich's thought and work is increasingly evident. Podcasts on the contours of a convivial society, online courses on Illich's thought that attract a small but worldwide audience, new blogs and books engaging with his arguments and insights, new attention from scholars, and renewed interest from activists, all suggest a revival of Illich's ideas.

Conspiratio is a periodical, and a periodical is different from a scholarly journal or a popular magazine. It collects the fruits of what is grown in a 'garden of low studies', a phrase proposed by Giorgio Agamben. *Conspiratio* is a vehicle for those who want to collaborate with each other in thinking after Illich. It is founded on the belief that arguments require the clarity and distance of the written word to be properly understood, even if it is the utterances of fleeting speech that can decisively change a heart. The name *Conspiratio* was previously used by the Mexican poet Javier Sicilia for a publication that is no longer in print. I asked his permission to reuse the name. Though we live in the time of conspiracy theories, fake news, and state and corporate propaganda, both Javier and I were inspired to choose the name by a line in Illich's

essay titled The Cultivation of Conspiracy — '*…the quest for truth cannot thrive outside the nourishment of mutual trust.*'

This inaugural issue leads with a series of essays on an issue of some moment — the pandemic. David Cayley's piece was first published on his blog and then widely circulated and translated into many languages. He discusses the pandemic from Illich's point of view. Two interlocutors — Wolfgang Palaver is an academic theologian and Jean-Pierre Dupuy is an academic philosopher — explicitly weigh in on the possible misappropriation of Illich's thought. Cayley's unanswered reply rounds out the series. The question concerning 'Life' is at the center of these essays and the reader can decide which of them offers a better understanding of Illich's insights into this vexatious question.

On Reading Ivan Illich is the theme for this inaugural issue and informs the choice of the articles. The first two articles have almost the same title but are widely separated by time and perspective. The first was written about twenty years ago by Lee Hoinacki, a close friend, to explain Illich's thought to new readers. The second is an edited chapter from the forthcoming dissertation by Neto Leao who defends how he, new to Illich, reads him. William Arney was kind enough to permit the republication of a chapter he wrote some years ago on reading Illich. His essay insists on the inseparability, for Illich, between the love of truth and the love of others. It is this idea that is amplified over the last two articles. Jean Robert's searing essay on the necessity to 'read' the strangeness of what is taken-for-granted exposes the unnerving aspect of the love of truth. Samar Farage's tender memory of reading Calvino with Illich affirms the solace found when the search for truth is grounded by the trust in others.

The reviews section focuses on a controversial recent documentary —*The Planet of the Humans* by Jeff Gibbs— and tangentially on the book — *Green Illusions* by Ozzie

Zehner— that informed it. The documentary became the object of a censorship campaign by well-known environmentalists including Bill McKibben, Naomi Klein, and Josh Fox. The film and the book argue that 'greening the economy' to solve the problem of climate change only renews the very industrial project that creates the environmental crisis. The question the green critics of the film avoid is why they think and act within the confines defined by techno-science and economics.

The section on translations contains a lightly edited translation from Spanish of a short essay co-authored by Valentina Borremans and Ivan Illich. It appears here for the first time in English and explores 'the need for a common roof' to beautiful and habitable social forms. The authors argue that technologies — whether money or machines — should be subjected to maximums, to ceilings, to limits. It is not a minimum wage or a minimum caloric input that should be guaranteed by public policy but rather a ceiling on income and consumption that must find community agreement. The language is dated and yet strikes a few notes of surprising contemporariness. The notion of limits — the need for a common roof —in its various applications is the theme of the third volume of *Conspiratio*.

David Cayley's new book is titled *Ivan Illich: An intellectual journey*. Reader responses to it is the theme of the upcoming second volume. Recalling that the periodical is an occasion to collaborate in thinking after Ivan Illich, all are invited to submit articles, essays, book reviews, and translations to these forthcoming volumes of *Conspiratio*.

Essays

on Questions concerning 'Life'

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE CURRENT PANDEMIC FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF IVAN ILLICH*

by David Cayley

Last week I began an essay on the current pandemic in which I tried to address what I take to be the central question that it raises: Is the massive and costly effort to contain and limit the harm that the virus will do the only choice we have? Is it no more than an obvious and unavoidable exercise of prudence undertaken to protect the most vulnerable? Or is it a disastrous effort to maintain control of what is obviously out of control, an effort which will compound the damage being done by the disease with new troubles that will reverberate far into the future? I hadn't been writing for long before I began to realize that many of the assumptions I was making were quite remote from those being expressed all around me. These assumptions had mainly come, I reflected, from my prolonged conversation with the work of Ivan Illich. What this suggested was that, before I could speak intelligibly about our present circumstances, I would first have to sketch the attitude towards health, medicine and well-being that Illich developed over a lifetime of reflection on these themes. Accordingly, in what follows, I will start with a brief account of the evolution of Illich's critique of bio-medicine and then try to answer the questions I just posed in this light..

At the beginning of his 1973 book *Tools of Conviviality*, Illich described what he thought was the typical course of development followed by contemporary institutions, using medicine as his example. Medicine, he said, had gone through

* This paper was first published on the DavidCayley.com website and is used with his permission.

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Cayley, D. Questions about the current pandemic
from the point of view of Ivan Illich.
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"two watersheds." The first had been crossed in the early years of the 20th century when medical treatments became demonstrably effective and benefits generally began to exceed harms. For many medical historians this is the only relevant marker – from this point on progress will proceed indefinitely, and, though there may be diminishing returns, there will be no point, in principle, at which progress will stop. This was not the case for Illich. He hypothesized a second watershed, which he thought was already being crossed and even exceeded around the time he was writing. Beyond this second watershed, he supposed, what he called counterproductivity would set in – medical intervention would begin to defeat its own objects, generating more harm than good. This, he argued, was characteristic of any institution, good or service – a point could be identified at which there was enough of it and, after which, there would be too much. *Tools for Conviviality*, was an attempt to identify these "natural scales" – the only such general and programmatic search for a philosophy of technology that Illich undertook.

Two years later in *Medical Nemesis* – later renamed, in its final and most comprehensive edition, *Limits to Medicine* – Illich tried to lay out in detail the goods and the harms that medicine does. He was generally favourable to the large-scale innovations in public health that have given us good food, safe water, clean air, sewage disposal etc. He also praised efforts then underway in China and Chile to establish a basic medical toolkit and pharmacopeia that would be available and affordable for all citizens, rather than allowing medicine to develop luxury goods that would remain forever out of reach of the majority. But the main point of his book was to identify and describe the counterproductive effects that he felt were becoming evident as medicine crossed its second watershed. He spoke of these fall-outs from too much medicine as *iatrogenesis*, and addressed them under three

headings: clinical, social and cultural. The first everyone, by now, understands – you get the wrong diagnosis, the wrong drug, the wrong operation, you get sick in hospital etc. This collateral damage is not trivial. An article in the Canadian magazine *The Walrus* – Rachel Giese, "The Errors of Their Ways, April 2012 – estimated 7.5% of the Canadians admitted to hospitals every year suffer at least one "adverse event" and 24,000 die as a result of medical mistakes. Around the same time, Ralph Nader, writing in *Harper's Magazine*, suggested that the number of people in the United States who die annually as a result of preventable medical errors is around 400,000. This is an impressive number, even if exaggerated – Nader's estimate is twice as high per capita as *The Walrus*'s – but this accidental harm was not, by any means, Illich's focus. What really concerned him was the way in which excessive medical treatment weakens basic social and cultural aptitudes. An instance of what he called social iatrogenesis is the way in which the *art* of medicine, in which the physician acts as healer, witness, and counsellor, tends to give way to the *science* of medicine, in which the doctor, as a scientist, must, by definition, treat his or her patient as an experimental subject and not as a unique case. And, finally, there was the ultimate injury that medicine inflicts: cultural iatrogenesis. This occurs, Illich said, when cultural abilities, built up and passed on over many generations, are first undermined and then, gradually, replaced altogether. These abilities include, above all, the willingness to suffer and bear one's own reality, and the capacity to die one's own death. The art of suffering was being overshadowed, he argued, by the expectation that all suffering can and should be immediately relieved – an attitude which doesn't, in fact, end suffering but rather renders it meaningless, making it merely an anomaly or technical miscarriage. And death, finally, was being transformed from an intimate, personal act – something each one can do – into a

meaningless defeat – a mere cessation of treatment or "pulling the plug," as is sometimes heartlessly said. Behind Illich's arguments lay a traditional Christian attitude. He affirmed that suffering and death are inherent in the human condition – they are part of what defines this condition. And he argued that the loss of this condition would involve a catastrophic rupture both with our past and with our own creatureliness. To mitigate and ameliorate the human condition was good, he said. To lose it altogether was a catastrophe because we can only know God as creatures – i.e. created or given beings – not as gods who have taken charge of our own destiny.

Medical Nemesis is a book about professional power – a point on which it's worth dwelling for a moment in view of the extraordinary powers that are currently being asserted in the name of public health. According to Illich, contemporary medicine, at all times, exercises *political* power, though this character may be hidden by the claim that all that is being asserted is *care*. In the province of Ontario where I live, "health care" currently gobbles up more than 40% of the government's budget, which should make the point clearly enough. But this everyday power, great as it is, can be further expanded by what Illich calls "the ritualization of crisis." This confers on medicine "a license that usually only the military can claim." He continues:

> Under the stress of crisis, the professional who is believed to be in command can easily presume immunity from the ordinary rules of justice and decency. He who is assigned control over death ceases to be an ordinary human…Because they form a charmed borderland not quite of this world, the time-span and the community space claimed by the medical enterprise are as sacred as their religious and military counterparts.

In a footnote to this passage Illich adds that "he who

successfully claims power in an emergency suspends and can destroy rational evaluation. The insistence of the physician on his exclusive capacity to evaluate and solve individual crises moves him symbolically into the neighborhood of the White House." There is a striking parallel here with the German jurist Carl Schmitt's claim in his *Political Theology* that the hallmark of true sovereignty is the power to "decide on the exception." Schmitt's point is that sovereignty stands above law because in an emergency the sovereign can suspend the law – declare an exception - and rule in its place as the very source of law. This is precisely the power that Illich says the physician "claims…in an emergency." Exceptional circumstances make him/her "immune" to the "ordinary rules" and able to make new ones as the case dictates. But there is an interesting and, to me, telling difference between Schmitt and Illich. Schmitt is transfixed by what he calls "the political." Illich notices that much of what Schmitt calls sovereignty has escaped, or been usurped from the political realm and reinvested in various professional hegemonies.

Ten years after *Medical Nemesis* was published, Illich revisited and revised his argument. He did not, by any means, renounce what he had written earlier, but he did add to it quite dramatically. In his book, he now said, he had been "blind to a much more profound symbolic iatrogenic effect: the iatrogenesis of the body itself." He had "overlooked the degree to which, at mid-century, the experience of 'our bodies and our selves' had become the result of medical concepts and cares." In other words he had written, in *Medical Nemesis*, as if there were a natural body, standing outside the web of techniques by which its self-awareness is constructed, and now he could see that there is no such standpoint. "Each historical moment," he wrote, "is incarnated in an epoch-specific body." Medicine doesn't just act on a preexisting state – rather it participates in creating this state.

This recognition was just the beginning of a new stance on Illich's part. *Medical Nemesis* had addressed a citizenry that was imagined as capable of acting to limit the scope of medical intervention. Now he spoke of people whose very self-image was being generated by bio-medicine. *Medical Nemesis* had claimed, in its opening sentence, that "the medical establishment has become a major threat to health." Now he judged that the major threat to health was the pursuit of health itself. Behind this change of mind lay his sense that the world, in the meanwhile, had undergone an epochal change. "I believe," he told me in 1988, "that… there [has been] a change in the mental space in which many people live. Some kind of a catastrophic breakdown of one way of seeing things has led to the emergence of a different way of seeing things. The subject of my writing has been the perception of sense in the way we live; and, in this respect, we are, in my opinion, at this moment, passing over a watershed. I had not expected in my lifetime to observe this passage." Illich characterized "the new way of seeing things" as the advent of what he called "the age of systems" or "an ontology of systems." The age that he saw as ending had been dominated by the idea of instrumentality – of using instrumental means, like medicine, to achieve some end or good, like health. Characteristic of this age was a clear distinction between subjects and objects, means and ends, tools and their users etc. In the age of systems, he said, these distinctions have collapsed. A system, conceived cybernetically, is all encompassing – it has no outside. The user of a tool takes up the tool to accomplish some end. Users of systems are inside the system, constantly adjusting their state to the system, as the system adjusts its state to them. A bounded individual pursuing personal well-being gives way to an immune system which constantly recalibrates its porous boundary with the surrounding system.

Within this new "system analytic discourse," as Illich named it, the characteristic state of people is disembodiment. This is a paradox, obviously, since what Illich called "the pathogenic pursuit of health" may involve an intense, unremitting and virtually narcissistic preoccupation with one's bodily state. Why Illich conceived it as disembodying can best be understood by the example of "risk awareness" which he called "the most important religiously celebrated ideology today." Risk was disembodying, he said, because "it is a strictly mathematical concept." It does not pertain to persons but to populations – no one knows what will happen to this or that person, but what will happen to the aggregate of such persons can be expressed as a probability. To identify oneself with this statistical figment is to engage, Illich said, in "intensive self-algorithmization."

His most distressing encounter with this "religiously celebrated ideology" occurred in the field of genetic testing during pregnancy. He was introduced to it by his friend and colleague Silja Samerski who was studying the genetic counselling that is mandatory for pregnant women considering genetic testing in Germany – a subject she would later write about in a book called *The Decision Trap* (Imprint-Academic, 2015). Genetic testing in pregnancy does not reveal anything definite about the child which the woman being tested is expecting. All it detects are markers whose uncertain meaning can be expressed in probabilities – a likelihood calculated across the entire population to which the one being tested belongs, by her age, family history, ethnicity etc. When she is told, for example, that there is a 30% chance that her baby will have this or that syndrome, she is told nothing about herself or the fruit of her womb – she is told only what *might* happen to someone *like* her. She knows nothing more about her actual circumstances than what her hopes, dreams and intuitions reveal, but the risk profile that has been ascertained for her

statistical doppelganger demands a decision. The choice is existential; the information on which it is based is the probability curve on which the chooser has been inscribed. Illich found this to be a perfect horror. It was not that he could not recognize that all human action is a shot in the dark – a prudential calculation in the face of the unknown. His horror was at seeing people reconceive themselves in the image of a statistical construct. For him, this was an eclipse of persons by populations; an effort to prevent the future from disclosing anything unforeseen; and a substitution of scientific models for sensed experience. And this was happening, Illich realized, not just with regard to genetic testing in pregnancy but more or less across the board in health care. Increasingly people were acting prospectively, probabilistically, according to their risk. They were becoming, as Canadian health researcher Allan Cassels once joked, "pre-diseased" – vigilant and active against illnesses that someone like them might get. Individual cases were increasingly managed as general cases, as instances of a category or class, rather than as unique predicaments, and doctors were increasingly the servo-mechanisms of this cloud of probabilities rather than intimate advisors alert to specific differences and personal meanings. This was what Illich meant by "self-algorithmization" or disembodiment.

One way of getting at the iatrogenic body that Illich saw as the primary effect of contemporary biomedicine is by going back to an essay that was widely read and discussed in his milieu in the early 1990's. Called "The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies: Constitutions of Self in Immune System Discourse," it was written by historian and philosopher of science Donna Haraway and appears in her 1991 book *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. This essay is interesting not just because I think it influenced Illich's sense of how bio-medical discourse was shifting, but also be-

cause Haraway, seeing – I would claim – almost exactly the same things as Illich, draws conclusions that are, point-for-point, diametrically opposite. In this article, for example, she says, with reference to what she calls "the post-modern body," that "human beings, like any other component or subsystem, must be localized in a system architecture whose basic modes of operation are probabilistic, statistical." "In a sense," she continues, "organisms have ceased to exist as objects of knowledge, giving way to biotic components." This leads to a situation in which "no objects, spaces or bodies are sacred in themselves; and components can be interfaced with any other if the proper standard, the proper code, can be constructed for processing signals in a common language." In a world of interfaces, where boundaries regulate "rates of flow" rather than marking real differences, "the integrity of natural objects" is no longer a concern. "The 'integrity' or 'sincerity' of the Western self," she writes, "gives way to decision procedures, expert systems, and resource investment strategies."

In other words, Haraway, like Illich understands that persons, as unique, stable and hallowed beings, have dissolved into provisionally self-regulating sub-systems in constant interchange with the larger systems in which they are enmeshed. In her words, "we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism…the cyborg is our ontology." The difference between them lies in their reactions. Haraway, elsewhere in the volume from which the essay I have been quoting comes, issues what she calls her "Cyborg Manifesto." It calls on people to recognize and accept this new situation but to "read it" with a view to liberation. In a patriarchal society, there is no acceptable condition to which one could hope to return, so she offers "an argument for *pleasure* in the confusion of boundaries and for *responsibility* in their construction." For Illich, on the other hand, the "cyborg ontology," as Haraway calls it, was not an option. For him what

was at stake was the very character of human persons as ensouled beings with a divine origin and a divine destiny. As the last vestiges of sense washed out of the bodily self-perception of his contemporaries, he saw a world that had become "immune to its own salvation." "I have come to the conclusion," he told me plaintively, "that when the angel Gabriel told that girl in the town of Nazareth in Galilee that God wanted to be in her belly, he pointed to a body which has gone from the world in which I live."

The "new way of seeing things" which was reflected in the orientation of bio-medicine amounted, according to Illich, to "a new stage of religiosity." He used the word *religiosity* in a broad sense to refer to something deeper and more pervasive than formal or institutional religion. Religiosity is the ground on which we stand, our feeling about how and why things are as they are, the very horizon within which meaning takes shape. For Illich, the createdness, or given-ness of the world was the foundation of his entire sensibility. What he saw coming was a religiosity of total immanence in which the world is its own cause and there is no source of meaning or order outside of it – "a cosmos," as he said, "in the hands of man." The highest good in such a world is life, and the primary duty of people is to conserve and foster life. But this is not the *life* which is spoken of in the Bible – the life which comes from God – it is a rather a resource which people possess and ought to manage responsibly. Its peculiar property is to be at the same time an object of reverence and of manipulation. This naturalized life, divorced from its source, is the new god. Health and safety are its adjutants. Its enemy is death. Death still imposes a final defeat but has no other personal meaning. There is no proper time to die – death ensues when treatment fails or is terminated.

Illich refused to "interiorize systems into the self." He would give up neither human nature nor natural law."I

just cannot shed the certainty," he said in an interview with his friend Douglas Lummis, "that the norms with which we ought to live correspond to our insight into what we are." This led him to reject "responsibility for health," conceived as a management of intermeshed systems. How can one be responsible, he asked, for what has neither sense, boundary nor ground? Better to give up such comforting illusions and to live instead in a spirit of self-limitation which he defined as "courageous, disciplined, self-critical renunciation accomplished in community."

To summarize: Illich, in his later years, concluded that humanity, at least in his vicinity, had taken leave of its senses and moved lock, stock and barrel into a system construct lacking any ground whatsoever for ethical decision. The bodies in which people lived and walked around had become synthetic constructs woven out of CAT-scans and risk curves. Life had become a quasi-religious idol, presiding over an "ontology of systems." Death had become a meaningless obscenity rather than an intelligible companion. All this was expressed forcefully and unequivocally. He did not attempt to soften it or offer a comforting "on the other hand…". What he attended to was what he sensed was happening around him, and all his care was to try to register it as sensitively as he could and address it as truthfully as he could. The world, in his view, was not in his hands, but in the hands of God.

By the time he died, in 2002, Illich stood far outside the new "way of seeing things" that he felt had established itself during the second half his life. He felt that in this new "age of systems" the primary unit of creation, the human person, had begun to lose its boundary, its distinction and its dignity. He thought that the revelation in which he was rooted had been corrupted – the "life more abundant" that had been promised in the New Testament transformed into a human hegemony so total and so claustrophobic that no inti-

mation from outside the system could disturb it. He believed that medicine had so far exceeded the threshold at which it might have eased and complemented the human condition that it was now threatening to abolish this condition altogether. And he had concluded that much of humanity is no longer willing to "bear…[its] rebellious, torn and disoriented flesh" and has instead traded its art of suffering and its art of dying for a few years of life expectancy and the comforts of life in an "artificial creation." Can any sense be made of the current "crisis" from this point of view? I would say yes, but only insofar as we can step back from the urgencies of the moment and take time to consider what is being revealed about our underlying dispositions – our "certainties," as Illich called them.

First of all, Illich's perspective indicates that for some time now we've been practicing the attitudes that have characterized the response to the current pandemic. It's a striking thing about events which are perceived to have changed history, or "changed everything," as one sometimes hears, that people often seem to be somehow ready for them or even unconsciously or semi-consciously expecting them. Recalling the beginning of the First World War, economic historian Karl Polanyi used the image of sleep-walking to characterize the way in which the countries of Europe shuffled to their doom – automatons blindly accepting the fate they had unknowingly projected. The events of Sept. 11, 2001 – 9/11 as we now know it – seemed to be instantly interpreted and understood, as if everyone had just been waiting to declare the patent meaning of what had occurred – the end of the Age of Irony, the beginning of the War on Terror, whatever it might be. Some of this is surely a trick of perspective by which hindsight instantly turns contingency into necessity – since something did happen, we assume that it was bound to happen all along. But I don't think this can be the whole story.

At the heart of the coronavirus response has been the

claim that we must act prospectively to prevent what has not yet occurred: an exponential growth in infections, an overwhelming of the resources of the medical system, which will put medical personnel in the invidious position of performing *triage*, etc. Otherwise, it is said, by the time we find out what we're dealing with, it will be too late. (It's worth pointing out, in passing, that this is unverifiable idea: if we succeed, and what we fear does not take place, then we will be able to say that our actions prevented it, but we will never actually know whether this was the case.). This idea that prospective action is crucial has been readily accepted, and people have even vied with one in another in denouncing the laggards who have shown resistance to it. But to act like this requires experience in living in a hypothetical space where prevention outranks cure, and this is exactly what Illich describes when he speaks of risk as "the most important religiously celebrated ideology today." An expression like "flattening the curve" can become overnight common sense only in a society practiced in "staying ahead of the curve" and in thinking in terms of population dynamics rather than actual cases.

Risk has a history. One of the first to identify it as the preoccupation of a new form of society was German sociologist Ulrich Beck in his 1986 book *Risk Society*, published in English in 1992. In this book, Beck portrayed late modernity as an uncontrolled science experiment. By uncontrolled he meant that we have no spare planet on which we can conduct a nuclear war to see how it goes, no second atmosphere which we can heat and observe the results. This means that techno-scientific society is, on the one hand, hyper-scientific and, on the other, radically unscientific insofar as it has no standard against which it can measure or assess what it has done. There are endless examples of this sort of uncontrolled experiment – from transgenic sheep to mass international tourism to the transformation of persons into communications relays.

All these, insofar as they have unforeseeable and unpredictable consequences, already constitute a kind of living in the future. And just because we are citizens of risk society, and therefore participants by definition, in an uncontrolled science experiment, we have become – paradoxically or not – preoccupied with controlling risk. As I pointed out above, we are treated and screened for diseases we do not yet have, on the basis of our probability of getting them. Pregnant couples make life and death decisions based on probabilistic risk profiles. Safety becomes a mantra – "farewell" becomes "be safe" – *health* becomes a god.

Equally important in the current atmosphere has been the idolization of life, and aversion from its obscene other, death. That we must at all costs "save lives" is not questioned. This makes it very easy to start a stampede. Making an entire country "go home and stay home," as our prime minister said not long ago, has immense and incalculable costs. No one knows how many businesses will fail, how many jobs will be lost, how many will sicken from loneliness, how many will resume addictions or beat each other up in their isolation. But these costs seem bearable as soon the spectre of lives lost is brought on the scene. Again, we have been practicing counting lives for a long time. The obsession with the "death toll" from the latest catastrophe is simply the other side of the coin. Life becomes an abstraction – a number without a story.

Illich claimed in the mid-1980's that he was beginning to meet people whose "very selves" were a product of "medical concepts and cares." I think this helps to explain why the Canadian state, and its component provincial and municipal governments, have largely failed to acknowledge what is currently at stake in our "war" on "the virus." Sheltering behind the skirts of science – even where there is no science – and deferring to the gods of health and safety has appeared to them as political necessity. Those who have been acclaimed

for their leadership, like Quebec premier François Legault, have been those who have distinguished themselves by their single-minded consistency in applying the conventional wisdom. Few have yet dared to question the cost – and, when those few include Donald Trump, the prevailing complacency is only fortified – who would dare agree with him? In this respect insistent repetition of the metaphor of war has been influential – in a war no one counts costs or reckons who is actually paying them. First, we must win the war. Wars create social solidarity and discourage dissent – those not showing the flag are apt to be shown the equivalent of the white feather with which non-combatants were shamed during World War One.

At the date at which I am writing – early April – no one really knows what is going on. Since no one knows how many have the disease, nobody knows what the death rate is – Italy's is currently listed at over 10%, which puts it in the range of the catastrophic influenza at the end of World War I, while Germany's is at .8%, which is more in line with what happens unremarked every year – some very old people, and a few younger ones, catch the flu and die. What does seem clear, here in Canada, is that, with the exception of a few local sites of true emergency, the pervasive sense of panic and crisis is largely a result of the measures taken against the pandemic and not of the pandemic itself. Here the word itself has played an important role – the declaration by the World Health Organization that a pandemic was now officially in progress didn't change anyone's health status but it dramatically changed the public atmosphere. It was the signal the media had been waiting for to introduce a regime in which nothing else but the virus could be discussed. By now a story in the newspaper not concerned with coronavirus is actually shocking. This cannot help but give the impression of a world on fire. If you talk about nothing else, it will soon

come to seem as if there is nothing else. A bird, a crocus, a spring breeze can begin to seem almost irresponsible – "don't they know it's the end of the world?" as an old country music classic asks. The virus acquires extraordinary agency – it is said to have depressed the stock market, shuttered businesses, and generated panic fear, as if these were not the actions of responsible people but of the illness itself. Emblematic for me, here in Toronto, was a headline in *The National Post*. In a font that occupied much of the top half of the front page, it said simply **PANIC**. Nothing indicated whether the word was to be read as a description or an instruction. This ambiguity is constitutive of all media, and disregarding it is the characteristic *déformation professionelle* of the journalist, but it becomes particularly easy to ignore in a certified crisis. It is not the obsessive reporting or the egging on of authorities to do more that has turned the world upside down – it is the virus that has done it. Don't blame the messenger. A headline on the web-site STAT on April 1, and I don't think it was a joke, even claimed that "Covid-19 has sunk the ship of state." It is interesting, in this respect, to perform a thought experiment. How much of an emergency would we feel ourselves to be in if this had never been called a pandemic and such stringent measures taken against it? Plenty of troubles escape the notice of the media. How much do we know or care about the catastrophic political disintegration of South Sudan in recent years, or about the millions who died in the Democratic Republic of Congo after civil war broke out there in 2004? It is our attention that constitutes what we take to be the relevant world at any given moment. The media do not act alone – people must be disposed to attend where the media directs their attention – but I don't think it can be denied that the pandemic is a constructed object that might have been constructed differently.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau remarked on

March 25th that we are facing "the greatest health care crisis in our history." If he is understood to be referring to a health crisis, this seems to me a grotesque exaggeration. Think of the disastrous effect of smallpox on indigenous communities, or of a score of other catastrophic epidemics from cholera and yellow fever to diphtheria and polio. Can you then really say that a flu epidemic which appears mainly to kill the old or those made susceptible by some other condition is even comparable to the ravaging of whole peoples, let alone worse? And yet, *unprecedented*, like the Prime Minister's "greatest ever," seems to be the word on everyone's lips. However, if we take the Prime Minister's words by the letter, as referring to health care, and not just health, the case changes. From the beginning the public health measures taken in Canada have been explicitly aimed at protecting the health *care* system from any overload. To me this points to an extraordinary dependence on hospitals and an extraordinary lack of confidence in our ability to care for one another. Whether Canadian hospitals are ever flooded or not, a strange and fearful mystique seems to be involved – the hospital and its cadres are felt to be indispensable, even when things could be more easily and safely dealt with at home. Again Illich was prescient in his claim, in his essay "Disabling Professions," that overextended professional hegemonies sap popular capacities and make people doubt their own resources.

The measures mandated by "the greatest health care crisis in our history" have involved a remarkable curtailing of civil liberty. This has been done, it is said, to protect life and, by the same token, to avoid death. Death is not only to be averted but also kept hidden and unconsidered. Years ago I heard a story about a bemused listener at one of Illich's lectures on *Medical Nemesis* who afterwards turned to his companion and asked, "What does he want, let people die?" Perhaps some of my readers would like to ask me the same

question. Well, I'm sure there are many other old people who would join me in saying that they don't want to see young lives ruined in order that they can live a year or two longer. But, beyond that, "let people die" is a very funny formulation because it implies that the power to determine who lives or dies is in the hands of the one to whom the question is addressed. The *we* who are imagined as having the power to "let die" exist in an ideal world of perfect information and perfect technical mastery. In this world nothing occurs which has not been chosen. If someone dies, it will be because they have been "let…die." The state must, at all costs, foster, regulate and protect life – this is the essence of what Michel Foucault called biopolitics, the regime that now unquestionably rules us. Death must be kept out of sight and out of mind. It must be denied meaning. No one's time ever comes – they are let go. The grim reaper may survive as a comic figure in *New Yorker* cartoons, but he has no place in public discussion. This makes it difficult even to talk about death as something other than someone's negligence or, at the least, a final exhaustion of treatment options. To accept death is to accept defeat.

The events of recent weeks reveal how totally we live inside systems, how much we have become populations rather than associated citizens, how much we are governed by the need to continually outsmart the future we ourselves have prepared. When Illich wrote books like *Tools for Conviviality* and *Medical Nemesis*, he still hoped that life within limits was possible. He tried to identify the thresholds at which technology must be restrained in order to keep the world at the local, sensible, conversable scale on which human beings could remain the political animals that Aristotle thought we were meant to be. Many others saw the same vision, and many have tried over the last fifty years to keep it alive. But there is no doubt that the world Illich warned of has come to

pass. It is a world which lives primarily in disembodied states and hypothetical spaces, a world of permanent emergency in which the next crisis is always right around the corner, a world in which the ceaseless babble of communication has stretched language past its breaking point, a world in which overstretched science has become indistinguishable from superstition. How then can Illich's ideas possibly gain any purchase in a world that seems to have moved out of reach of his concepts of scale, balance, and personal meaning? Shouldn't one just accept that the degree of social control that has recently been exerted is proportionate and necessary in the global immune system of which we are, in Haraway's expression, "biotic components?"

Perhaps, but it's an old political axiom which can be found in Plato, Thomas More, and, more recently, Canadian philosopher George Grant that if you can't achieve the best, at least prevent the worst. And things can certainly get worse as a result of this pandemic. It has already become a somewhat ominous commonplace that the world will not be the same once it is over. Some see it as a rehearsal and admit frankly that, though this particular plague may not fully justify the measures being taken against it, these measures still constitute a valuable rehearsal for future and potentially worse plagues. Others view it as a "wake-up call" and hope that, when it's all over, a chastened humanity will begin to edge its way back from the lip of catastrophe. My fear, and one that I think is shared by many, is that it will leave behind a disposition to accept much increased surveillance and social control, more telescreens and telepresencing, and heightened mistrust. At the moment, everyone is optimistically describing physical distancing as a form of solidarity, but it's also practice in regarding one another, and even ourselves – "don't touch your face" – as potential disease vectors.

I have said already that one of the certainties that the

pandemic is driving deeper into the popular mind is risk. But this is easy to overlook since risk is so easily conflated with real danger. The difference, I would say, is that danger is identified by a practical judgment resting on experience, whereas risk is a statistical construct pertaining to a population. Risk has no room for individual experience or for practical judgment. It tells you only what will happen *in general*. It is an abstract of a population, not a picture of any person, or a guide to that person's destiny. Destiny is a concept that simply dissolves in the face of risk, where all are arrayed, uncertainly, on the same curve. What Illich calls "the mysterious historicity" of each existence – or, more simply, its meaning – is annulled. During this pandemic, risk society has come of age. This is evident, for example, in the tremendous authority that has been accorded to models – even when everyone knows that they are informed by little more than what one hopes are educated guesses. Another illustration is the familiarity with which people speak of "flattening the curve," as if this were an everyday object – I have even recently heard songs about it. When it becomes an object of public policy to operate on a purely imaginary, mathematical object, like a risk curve, it is certain that risk society has taken a great leap forward. This, I think, is what Illich meant about disembodiment – the impalpable become palpable, the hypothetical becomes actual, and the realm of everyday experience becomes indistinguishable from its representation in newsrooms, laboratories and statistical models. Humans have lived, at all times, in imagined worlds, but this, I think, is different. In the sphere of religion, for example, even the most naïve believers have the sense that the beings they summon and address in their gatherings are not everyday objects. In the discourse of the pandemic, everyone consorts familiarly with scientific phantoms as if there were as real as rocks and trees.

Another related feature of the current landscape is gov-

ernment-by-science and its necessary complement - the abdication of political leadership resting on any other grounds. This too is a field long-tilled and prepared for planting. Illich wrote nearly fifty years ago in *Tools for Conviviality* that contemporary society is "stunned by a delusion about science." This delusion takes many forms, but its essence is to construct out of the messy, contingent practices of a myriad of sciences a single golden calf before which all must bow. It is this giant mirage that is usually invoked when we are instructed to "listen to the science" or told what "studies show" or "science says." But there is no such thing as science, only *sciences*, each one with its unique uses and unique limitations. When "science" is abstracted from all the vicissitudes and shadows of knowledge production, and elevated into an omniscient oracle whose priests can be identified by their outfits, their solemn postures and their impressive credentials, what suffers, in Illich's view, is political judgment. We do not do what appears good to our rough and ready sense of how things are down here on the ground but only what can be dressed up as *science says*. In a book called *Rationality and Ritual*, British sociologist of science Brian Wynne studied a public inquiry carried out by a British High Court Judge in 1977 on the question of whether a new plant should be added to the British nuclear energy complex at Sellafield on the Cumbrian coast. Wynne shows how the judge approached the question as one which "science" would answer – is it safe? – without any need to consult moral or political principles. This is a classic case of the displacement of political judgment onto the shoulders of Science, conceived along the mythical lines I sketched above. This displacement is now evident in many fields. One of its hallmarks is that people, thinking that "science" knows more than it does, imagine that they know more than they do. No actual knowledge need support this confidence. Epidemiologists may say frankly, as many have,

that, in the present case, there is very little sturdy evidence to go on, but this has not prevented politicians from acting as if they were merely the executive arm of Science. In my opinion, the adoption of a policy of semi-quarantining those who are not sick – a policy apt to have disastrous consequences down the road in lost jobs, failed businesses, distressed people, and debt-suffocated governments – is a political decision and ought to be discussed as such. But, at the moment, the ample skirts of Science shelter all politicians from view. Nor does anyone speak of impending moral decisions. Science will decide.

In his late writings Illich introduced, but never really developed, a concept that he called "epistemic sentimentality" – not a catchy phrase, admittedly, but one that I think sheds on light on what is currently going on. His argument, in brief, was that we live in a world of "fictitious substances" and "management-bred phantoms" – any number of nebulous goods from institutionally-defined education to the "pathogenic pursuit of health" could serve as examples – and that in this "semantic desert full of muddled echoes" we need "some prestigious fetish" to serve as a "Linus blanket." In the essay I've been quoting "Life" is his primary example. "Epistemic sentimentality" attaches itself to Life, and Life becomes the banner under which projects of social control and technological overreach acquire warmth and lustre. Illich calls this *epistemic* sentimentality because it involves constructed objects of knowledge that are then naturalized under the kindly aegis of the "prestigious fetish." In the present case we are frantically saving lives and protecting our health care system. These noble objects enable a gush of sentiment which is very hard to resist. For me it is summed up in the almost unbearably unctuous tone in which our Prime Minister now addresses us daily. But who is not in an agony of solicitude? Who has not said that we are avoiding each other because of

the depth of our care for one another? This is epistemic sentimentality not just because it solaces us and makes a ghostly reality seem humane but also because it hides the other things that are going on – like the mass experiment in social control and social compliance, the legitimation of tele-presence as a mode of sociability and of instruction, the increase of surveillance, the normalization of biopolitics, and the reinforcement of risk awareness as a foundation of social life.

Another concept that I believe Illich has to contribute to current discussion is the idea of "dynamic balances" that he develops in *Tools for Conviviality*. This thought came to me recently while reading, in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, a refutation of Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben's dissident position on the pandemic. Agamben had written earlier against the inhumanity of a policy that lets people die alone and then outlaws funerals, arguing that a society which sets "bare life" higher than the preservation of its own way of life has embraced what amounts to a fate worse than death. Fellow philosopher Anastasia Berg, in her response, expresses respect for Agamben, but then claims that he has missed the boat. People are cancelling funerals, isolating the sick and avoiding one another not because mere survival has become the be-all and end-all of public policy, as Agamben claims, but in a spirit of loving sacrifice which Agamben is too obtuse and theory- besotted to notice. The two positions appear starkly opposed, and the choice an either/or. One either views social distancing, with Anastasia Berg, as a paradoxical and sacrificial form of solidarity, or one views it with Agamben as a fateful step into a world where inherited ways of life dissolve in an ethos of survival at all costs. What Illich tried to argue in *Tools for Conviviality* is that public policy must always strike a balance between opposed domains, opposed rationalities, opposed virtues. The whole book is an attempt to discern the point at which serviceable tools – tools *for* con-

viviality – turn into tools which become ends in themselves and begin to dictate to their users. In the same way he tried to distinguish practical political judgment from expert opinion, home-made speech from the coinages of mass media, vernacular practices from institutional norms. Many of these attempted distinctions have since drowned in the monochrome of "the system," but the idea can still be helpful I think. It encourages us to ask the question, what is enough? where is the point of balance? Right now this question is not asked because the goods we pursue are generally taken to be unlimited – we cannot, by assumption, have too much education, too much health, too much law, or too much of any of the other institutional staples on which we lavish our hope and our substance. But what if the question were revived? This would require us to ask in what way Agamben might be right, while still allowing Berg's point. Perhaps a point of balance could be found. But this would require some ability to sustain a divided mind – the very hallmark of thinking, according to Hannah Arendt – as well as the resuscitation of political judgment. Such an exercise of political judgment would involve a discussion of what is being lost in the present crisis as well as what is being gained. But who deliberates in an emergency? Total mobilization – total preoccupation – the feeling that everything has changed – the certainty of living in a state of exception rather than in ordinary time – all these things militate against political deliberation. This is a vicious circle: we can't deliberate because we're in an emergency, and we're in an emergency because we can't deliberate. The only way out of the circle is by the way in – the way created by assumptions that have become so ingrained as to seem obvious.

Illich had a sense, during the last twenty years of his life, of a world immured in "an ontology of systems," a world immune to grace, alienated from death, and totally convinced of its duty to manage every eventuality – a world, as he once

put it, in which "exciting, soul-capturing abstractions have extended themselves over the perception of world and self like plastic pillowcases." Such a view does not readily lend itself to policy prescriptions. Policy is made in the moment according to the exigencies of the moment. Illich was talking about modes of sensing, of thinking, and of feeling that had crept into people at a much deeper level. Accordingly, I hope that no one who has read this far thinks that I have been making facile policy proposals rather than trying to describe a fate that all share. Still my view of the situation is probably clear enough from what I have written. I think this tunnel we have entered – of physical distancing, flattening the curve etc. – will be very hard to get out of – either we call it off soon and face the possibility that it was all for naught, or we extend it and create harms that may be worse than the casualties we have averted. This is not to say we should do nothing. It is a pandemic. But it would have been better, in my view, to try and keep going and used targeted quarantine for the demonstrably ill and their contacts. Close baseball stadiums and large hockey arenas, by all means, but keep small businesses open and attempt to space the customers in the same way as the stores that have stayed open are doing. Would more then die? Perhaps, but this is far from clear. And that's exactly my point: no one knows. Swedish economist Fredrik Erixon, the director of the European Centre for International Political Economy, made the same point recently in defence of Sweden's current policy of precaution without shut-down. "The theory of lockdown," he says, is "untested" – which is true – and, consequently, "It's not Sweden that's conducting a mass experiment. It's everyone else."

But, to say it again, my intention here is not to contest policy but to bring to light the practiced certainties that make our current policy seem incontestable. Let me take a final example. Recently a Toronto newspaper columnist suggested

that the current emergency can be construed as a choice between "saving the economy" or "saving granny." In this figure two prime certainties are pitted against one another. If we take these phantoms as real things rather than as questionable constructions, we can only end up by setting a price on granny's head. Better, I want to argue, to try to think and speak in a different way. Perhaps the impossible choices thrown up by the world of modelling and management are a sign that things are being framed in the wrong way. Is there a way to move from granny as a "demographic" to a person who can be nursed and comforted and accompanied to the end of her road; from The Economy as the ultimate abstraction to the shop down the street in which someone has invested all they have and which they may now lose. At present, "the crisis" holds reality hostage, captive in its enclosed and airless system. It's very difficult to find a way of speaking in which *life* is something other and more than a resource which each of us must responsibly manage, conserve, and, finally, save. But I think it important to take a careful look at what has come into the light in recent weeks: medical science's ability to "decide on the exception" and then take power; the media's power to remake what is sensed as reality, while disowning its own agency; the abdication of politics before Science, even when there is no science; the disabling of practical judgment; the enhanced power of risk awareness; and the emergence of Life as the new sovereign. Crises change history but not necessarily for the better. A lot will depend on what the event is understood to have meant. If, in the aftermath, the certainties I have sketched here are not brought into question, then the only possible outcome I can see is that they will fasten themselves all the more securely on our minds and become obvious, invisible, and unquestionable.

FURTHER READING

Here some links to articles which I have cited above or which have influenced my thinking:

https://nationalpost.com/opinion/why-draconian-measures-may-not-work-two-experts-say-we-should-prioritize-those-at-risk-from-covid-19-than-to-try-to-contain
https://www.statnews.com/2020/03/17/a-fiasco-in-the-making-as-the-coronavirus-pandemic-takes-hold-we-are-making-decisions-without-reliable-data/
https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/The-evidence-on-Covid-19-is-not-as-clear-as-we-think
https://off-guardian.org/2020/03/17/listen-cbc-radio-cuts-off-expert-when-he-questions-covid19-narrative/ (This story is misheaded – Duncan McCue doesn't cut off Dr. Kettner – it's because Kettner gets to make so many strong points that the item is valuable.)
https://off-guardian.org/2020/03/24/12-experts-questioning-the-coronavirus-panic/
https://www.journal-psychoanalysis.eu/coronavirus-and-philosophers/ (Agamben's view can be found here along with a lot of other interesting material.)
Giorgio Agamben's Coronavirus Cluelessness (Anastasia Berg's critique of Agamben)
https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/no-lockdown-please-we-re-swedish (Frederik Erixon)

"IT DOESN'T WORK WITHOUT FEAR"*

A conversation with the theologian
Wolfgang Palaver

DIE ZEIT: Mr. Palaver, only statistics speak of the corona deaths, their fate is rarely told. Can't death be represented in the media? It seems like that in the USA in particular.

Wolfgang Palaver: I have to contradict you right away. Perhaps it is the case in Europe that individual fates are lost in statistics. But in the USA, for example, the PBS *NewsHour* sends short portraits of the deceased every Friday. Similar to *The Loss* from NBC News or the *Those We've Lost* section in the New York Times. Apart from the president, the way the country mourns its dead is exemplary. In Europe I miss that. In our country it seems that a Covid infection is something to be ashamed of. You don't want to speak to them. They are anonymized.

ZEIT: Are we incapable of public mourning?

Palaver: Maybe we are too moralistic about the virus. Family and friends are "good", so not infected, then why shouldn't we be able to meet them? And we have nothing to do with infected people. The best thing to do is to hide Covid as the cause of death if it does happen.

**Only fear of death and catastrophe leads us to act responsibly: A conversation with the theologian Wolfgang Palaver about dying and mourning in the pandemic. Interview: Thomas Assheuer.*
December 22, 2020, 4:44 p.m. Edited on December 27, 2020, 9:53 p.m.
DIE ZEIT No. 54/2020

Wolfgang Palaver, wolfgang.palaver@uibk.ac.at
Palaver, W. "It doesn't work without fear".
Conspiratio, Fall 2021, p.42-48.

ZEIT: Are corona-deniers extremists of repression of death?

Palaver: The people who scream for freedom at such demonstrations believe that they are not in danger, and that is why they suppress the danger. In fact, as humans we always have to suppress death in a certain way, otherwise we would constantly look into the abyss of our own mortality. On the other hand, we cannot use our freedom without an enlightened apocalyptic, not without a certain fear. As long as we regard disasters or our own death as a mere distant possibility, they leave us cold. Therefore, we need to be aware of our own mortality again.

ZEIT: Do you want to make politics with fear?

Palaver: It's not about a politics of fear, but about an enlightened catastrophism, that is, a fear that motivates to act out of responsibility and does not assume in an optimistic blind flight that nothing will happen. This is essential with a view to the climate catastrophe and also important with regard to the pandemic. Only if we consider catastrophic bottlenecks in intensive care medicine early enough can we motivate society to stop dangerous developments.

ZEIT: The philosopher Giorgio Agamben claims that the medical effort with which we save the infected proves that we have lost our natural relationship to dying and death. Liberalism makes life a fetish.

Palaver: Agamben really upsets me. He is more papal than the Pope and more ecclesiastical than the Church. He claims that the Church has given up salvation and sacrificed it to health: because it sought salvation - "salvezza" - in history, it could

only end in health - "salute". Nonsense! Why did Jesus heal people and take care of physical ailments? The many healings alone contradict Agamben's theological escape from the world. "I am the LORD, your doctor." Or think of the miracle of the multiplication of bread. When people are hungry, you have to do something! Agamben practices bad theology when he tears salvation and health apart.

ZEIT: Many theologians and philosophers seem to like that.

Palaver: They often prematurely applaud Agamben. Sure, you have to ask where he sees something right. Indeed, bare life is not enough; it is about living with dignity. And Agamben rightly laments an attitude for which health and survival are the most important things in life. But here one would have to ask: is it about my own life? Or is it the concern that applies to other people? I would find it fatal if Agamben's criticism resulted in the attitude: Don't make such a fuss about the pandemic and don't try to save everyone. At some point we'll die anyway, a few years don't matter.

ZEIT: In the discussion about the corona measures, the name of the theologian Ivan Illich appears again and again. He was a sharp critic of apparatus medicine. Like Agamben.

Palaver: Agamben is the editor of Illich's writings in Italy. And Illich was a master at showing how good things can turn into negative. He showed that one must not elevate the sanctity of life to an ideological program, otherwise one achieves the opposite and turns life into a fetish. It is the same with the parable of the good Samaritan. That is great, but we cannot derive a rigid set of rules from it, it would be counterproductive. Nevertheless, we can only understand Illich's criticism of the fetishization of life as a warning. And by no means as an

invitation to let people die.

ZEIT: There is no life without risk. After all, we don't prohibit driving.

Palaver: It's not the same. Of course, there are risk factors in life, but we would never justify driving a car if we knew that this or that group would be killed in the process.

ZEIT: From the AfD you can hear: "Life is not the highest of goods."

Palaver: Bare life is certainly not the greatest good. But the crucial question is whose life is at stake here. I agree with the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, who recognized that clinging to your own life at all costs is the root of violence and war. However, we are responsible for each other's life. It is our highest responsibility, for which we may even have to sacrifice our lives, like Maximilian Kolbe or Franz Jägerstätter. Or the pastor Don Giuseppe Berardelli, who left his ventilator to the seriously ill.

ZEIT: Trump fans are demanding that the state protect freedom and not abolish death. Others claim the pandemic is giving us an opportunity to learn how to die again. For you this is a "sacralization of death". What do you mean by that?

Palaver: There is an opinion that we have to understand death like the dying of plants. If the grain of wheat doesn't die, it won't produce rich fruit. Such images have always shaken me when they are misinterpreted. The origin of this thinking, I believe, lies in the archaic scapegoat mechanism described by the French religious philosopher René Girard. Girard shows that killing a member of a tribal group brings harmony and

new life to that group. The peacemaking is only attributed to the scapegoat and not to the group - his death brings new life, the body of the victim becomes the source of life. Judaism protests against this transfiguration of death and insists that death provides no orientation. Life alone gives orientation.

ZEIT: And what does that have to do with the pandemic?

Palaver: A lot. During the pandemic I learned to emphasize the primacy of life with Judaism and not to agree to any watering down of this attitude. We must hold on to the Jewish idea of the holiness of life. Everything that we are now writing about death in the pandemic must not deviate from the Jewish line of tradition, the emphasis on life. And where Christian theology deviates only a millimeter from the Jewish preference for life, it becomes bad theology. The Christians here - also because of a wrong view of Jesus' death on the cross - often too quickly made compromises with death. Christ did not die in praise of death.

ZEIT: Does the sacralization of death open the abyss to social Darwinism? In the USA, corona deniers demanded: "Sacrifice the weak!"

Palaver: The scapegoat logic is built into utility thinking, based on the motto: If a person dies and therefore a million people live, it is a good calculation. Morally I find that wrong, and it leads to social Darwinism: "Sacrifice the weak!" Consciously accepting the sacrifice of people for the greatest happiness of the greatest number is not acceptable.

ZEIT: Did the Swedish way of fighting pandemics also follow this victim logic? The old people were not given much attention.

Palaver: I refused the way from the start. Ethically, everything in us would have to rebel if there were any consideration of sacrificing the old. We mustn't take other people's lives into account. In the meantime, even in Sweden, this path has been recognized as the wrong one.

ZEIT: It is unrealistic to align politics with the sanctity of life. We have to weigh up.

Palaver: That's true, but with this consideration one would still orientate oneself on the sanctity of life. And that doesn't seem to have been the case in Sweden.

ZEIT: Aren't we experiencing an abysmal relationship between freedom and death in the pandemic? By exercising my freedom, I can kill others. This is not provided for in self-centered liberalism.

Palaver: I have to keep wondering what my freedom means for the lives of others. But we see how difficult this responsibility is for us - presumably for the reason that we cannot imagine the deadly danger.

ZEIT: The writer Juli Zeh, the essayist Thea Dorn, the philosopher Julian Nida-Rümelin or the virologist Hendrik Streeck - to name just a few - complain about the restriction of basic rights. How far does the appeal to the concept of freedom carry? Does it need correction?

Palaver: When it comes to the lives of others, fundamental rights may have to be restricted - but democratically controlled. In everyday life, however, one often comes across an understanding of freedom that only sees one's own needs.

That needs correction. But as someone who has enjoyed globalization so far, I have to wonder how people at the bottom of the economic ladder are doing. Therefore we, the privileged, should refrain from complaining about restrictions of freedom.

IVAN ILLICH'S TRUE LEGACY: ON THE SO-CALLED 'SACRALIZATION OF LIFE'*

by Jean-Pierre Dupuy

Among the critics of the health policy carried out against the Covid-19 crisis, some more or less explicitly claim the thought of Ivan Illich, denouncing the "idolatry of life" to the point of succumbing to the fashion of covidoscepticism. However, what the philosopher criticized was not the sacralization of life, but its degradation. Should it not therefore be protected when it is in danger? Jean-Pierre Dupuy discusses here what is most painful for him: the legacy of Ivan Illich. Second part of a series of two articles.

The first time I saw Ivan Illich was on a TV screen. He was interviewed by the director of Esprit magazine Jean-Marie Domenach in the courtyard of a mansion on Rue de l'Université in Paris. It was 1971 or 1972. What struck Illich from the outset was his profile as a bird of prey and his voice that was both smooth and sharp, with the aristocratic accent of Central Europe marrying with an almost brutal way of accentuating the last syllable of words.

The conversation had lasted more than an hour when Domenach asked the question that had remained in the background throughout the interview: "And the Church, Ivan, the Church, in all this? The question was all the more relevant to those who knew the basic elements of the biography of this fascinating man, born in Vienna in 1926, who had been a priest and even *Monsignor* in the hierarchy of the Catholic Church before being subjected to an inquisitorial trial in Rome.

* The original french article "Le veritable heritage d'Ivan Illich — sur une pretendue 'sacralisation de la vie" was published in the journal AOC on January 21, 2021.

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Dupuy, J. Ivan Illich's true legacy: on the so-called 'sacralization of life'. Conspiratio, Fall 2021, p.49-58.

As he usually did, Illich meditated for a moment before pronouncing: "The Church is a whore, but she is also my mother."

Like many viewers no doubt, I was stunned. Domenach was a friend and I knew from him that Illich, author of two books that had already created a lot of controversy, *Liberating the Future* and *A Society Without School,* had started a program of research, meetings, and discussions on medical institutions in Cuernavaca, some 60 kilometers south of Mexico city, where he had settled. Domenach, who knew that I was working on the subject myself, introduced us to each other and this was the beginning of a friendship that was not to end until Illich's death in December 2002.[1]

I passed several stays in Cuernavaca, working in particular on the booklet *Energy and Equity* (Seuil, 1973), a criticism of the transportation system and a demystification more relevant than ever on the idea that we would have an ever-increasing need for energy. It was during the winter of 1975 that I wrote in close complicity with Illich what would become the French version of his great book on medicine, under the title *Némésis médicale* (Seuil, 1975).

I mention these circumstances because they plunge me back into an era and place so far from ours that I sometimes wonder if they ever existed. Every winter, very mild and sunny in this region of Mexico, the whole world ran to Cuernavaca in order to sketch the paths of metamorphosis. All languages were spoken there, and of course Spanish. Illich's Spanish was very good and allowed him to play on the double meaning of the word "*salud*": health and salvation. He could therefore state that just as the Church had acquired a "radical monopoly" on the production of salvation, medicine has

1 Note of 20 September 2020. Jean-Michel Djian has just published at Le Seuil a remarkable biography of Ivan Illich entitled: Ivan Illich. The man who liberated the future. There are precious indications of the itinerary of this exceptional man.

done the same with regard to the production of health. In either case, the result is that the more the institution grows, the more it becomes an obstacle to the very end it was supposed to serve. This is the origin of the concept of counterproductivity.

If I contributed anything to our discussions in the winter of 1975, it was to have insisted on the distinction between two forms of counterproductivity, one social, the other structural. As they pull in two opposite directions, it was inevitable that they would blur the message. According to the first, Illich presents himself as a progressive activist; according to the second, as a thinker who is now thought to be reactionary. However, there is only one Illich.

At the time, my friend the sociologist Serge Karsenty, who passed too early, and I published a book that had achieved some scandalous success, *The Pharmaceutical Invasion* (Seuil, 1974), in which we introduced a notion that flourished, the "medicalization of life", and a formula "medicine has become the alibi of a pathogenic society." By this we meant that many evils of modern society, such as the excessiveness of production units, the density of urban spaces, the fragmentation of living spaces, the acceleration of transportation, the disintegration of families, the anxiety that results from unbridled competition between individuals and so on, are treated as pathologies that can be presented to the medical profession and receive therapy.

These issues, which fall within the political sphere, are thus naturalized. Medicine, consciously or unconsciously, is complicit in the *status quo*. This is its social counterproductivity. Illich took up this analysis.

He must have regretted it some fifteen years later. His technique for convincing was to shock. The paradox was his favorite weapon. When his ideas entered the common consciousness, especially when they were taken up by the very

professionals who were the target of his criticism, they lost all usefulness in his eyes. This is what happened over the years with some of the doctors, who clearly saw that what they were increasingly asked to accomplish was not what they had been taught on the benches the faculty. Following Illich's lesson as they understood it, it now seemed urgent to them to "de-medicalize" society and "return power to patients", encouraging their autonomy and promoting their personal care.
Illich replied in a paper he delivered on September 14, 1990, in Hanover, Germany, under the significant and cyrano-esque title: "Would health be my personal responsibility? No, thank you! I quote here the magnificent conclusion of this paper.[2] It illustrates the core of what I have called the structural counterproductivity of medicine above:

> "It does not seem to me that it is necessary for States to have a national policy of "health", something they grant to their citizens. What they need is the courageous ability to face certain truths:
> —we will never eliminate pain;
> —we will never cure all afflictions;
> —We will certainly die.
> That is why, as thinking creatures, we must understand that the quest for health can become unhealthy. There are no scientific or technical solutions. There is the daily obligation to accept the contingency and fragility of the human condition. Reasoned limits should be set for conventional health care. The urgency must be to define the duties incumbent on us as individuals, those that we return to our community, and those we leave to the State. Yes, we hurt, we get sick, we die, but it is no less true that we hope, laugh, celebrate; we know the joys that strive

2 The English version was published under the title: "Health as one's own responsibility: no thank you!", Journal of Consciousness Studies, v.1, n.1, 1994, p.25-31, My translation

> to take care of each other. The means are diverse that often allow us to recover and heal. Our sensitivity does not have to follow a uniform and trivialized path.
> I invite everyone to turn their eyes and thoughts away from the pursuit of health, and to cultivate the art of living. And, just as important today, the art of suffering and the art of dying."

I understand that those who think that we have exaggerated the current pandemic can find comfort in these words. That would be a mistake. It is always uncomfortable to make the dead speak, but I imagine Illich reacting to the current situation. The huge difference that would separate him from the doxa of intellectuals is that he would have no need to belittle life to criticize the supposed control of the state and the medical profession over the course of the epidemic.

He saw life as an art, made up of daily duties and obligations, but also of joys and friendships. He would have burst into gales of laughter —he could be cruel, but cruelty directed only against stupidity —on hearing the slices into which these logic chopping intellectuals had carved life by distinguishing between social life, economic life, and naked, raw life, "biological life." That baroque expression would have turned his laughter to anger. He would have asked sociologists if they studied "sociological society" and anthropologists if they looked at the fate of someone called "anthropological man."

Illich's critique is not against the idolatry of human life placed on a pedestal in the hierarchy of "values" (a word he abhorred) by the state allied with the medical profession, but, on the contrary, about its debasement. In what is probably his best book, although posthumous and which is in fact an interview with Canadian journalist David Cayley,[3] Illich

3 Ivan Illich & David Cayley, La Corruption du meilleur engendre le pire, entretiens

discloses all the horror he feels having to confront representation of the human body that makes it an assembly of parts forming a system, each of which can be replaced, for a fee, by another taken from a dead person. What would he say today about the biotechnologies that are called "advanced" and which aim, some to "edit" the human genome, and others to fabricate life from non-life?

If we mean by "biological life" the conception of life that is derived from biology, then the observation is very brutal. François Jacob could write in 1970: "Life is no longer questioned today in laboratories. [...] Biology is interested in the algorithms of the living world today."[4] To the question asked in 1943 by the physicist Erwin Schrödinger, "*What is Life*," a question that was to lead to the discovery of DNA as a molecule of heredity and to the invention, via cybernetics, of molecular biology, the journal *Nature* answers today: "*A silly question!*"[5] Our intellectuals strive in vain to denounce the sacralization of life. Biology has gone farther than they will ever dare to go by reducing it to nothing.

Illich has often been compared to Michel Foucault by making the first a kind of disciple of the second, having borrowed his concept of biopower from him. It's a misinterpretation. At the time of the release of François Jacob's book, the author of *Words and Things* did not hide his enthusiasm: "A lifeless biology? […] We must no longer think of life as the great continuous and attentive creation of individuals; we must think of the living as the calculable game of chance and reproduction.[6] We can't be further from Illich's thought. Foucault would probably be one of the flag bearers of this sinister

traduits de l'américain par Daniel De Bruycker et Jean Robert, Actes Sud, 2007

4 François Jacob, La Logique du vivant, Gallimard, 1970.

5 Philip Ball, "What is Life? A silly question!," Nature, 6 juin 2007.

6 Michel Foucault, compte rendu du livre de François Jacob, La Logique du vivant, Le Monde, 16 novembre 1970.

fashion that denigrates life today.

It was in the book of interviews he had with David Cayley that Illich, for the first time, spoke about how he would like to die. It tells the last day of the Dominican brother Girolamo Savonarola, who was executed for heresy in Florence on May 23, 1498. With two other brothers who had publicly supported him, he had to be hanged before being burned, a sign of the advanced civilization of the Tuscan capital, notes Illich ironically. Savonarola turns to one of his companions and said to him: 'it was revealed to me last night that when you are taken to the gallows you must say, "no, don't hang me, burn me alive." We are not masters of our death. Let us be happy if we can die the death that God assigns to us.'

If we limit ourselves to saying that Illich preaches the reconquest of autonomy in the face of the grip of medicine, we do not understand that he was able to oppose what many today consider "ethical" progress, the free decision about the time of his death. Life, a pure gift every day miraculously renewed, is stronger than death. She knows better than we when it will be time.

Alas, a thousand times alas, David Cayley who knew how to get Illich to confess to things he had never said before, especially about how his faith informed his thought, has succumbed to the spirit of the times. In an April 2020 article entitled 'Questions asked of the current pandemic from Ivan Illich's point of view,'[7] he multiplies clichés and expresses his ignorance. This of course begins with the classic minimization of the severity of the pandemic. "Can we really say that an influenza epidemic (*sic*!)[8] which seems to kill the old peo-

7 David Cayley, "Questions about the current pandemic from the point of view of Ivan Illich," Quodlibet, 8 avril 2020.

8 The assimilation of Covid-19 to influenza is one of the leitmotives of covidoscepticism. This is a mistake all the more serious because it is often committed voluntarily, to lower the severity of the pandemic. The SARS-CoV-2 virus is much more similar to that of AIDS than to that of influenza. The way it kills, even once it

ple above all (re-*sic*!) and vulnerable people are comparable [to diseases] that ravage entire populations?"

As for the feeling of crisis and panic that has seized the entire planet, it is much more the result of the measures taken to contain the epidemic than of the epidemic itself. The mere fact of naming the circulation of the virus a "pandemic" has contributed to the "social construction" of the event as a global disaster. As for these measures, their main purpose was to protect the health system much more than the patients. They could have done very well by taking care of each other "at home" (re-re-*sic*!).

I am almost ashamed to report these stupidities, but there is a more serious matter than that. David Cayley says, like Illich, that the life that must be preserved is a statistical life, which can be added up to others like anchovies in an anchovy box, to produce huge figures that break new records every day, and not the life lived — felt authentic life. At the end of April, New York State alone had 1,000 deaths per day, at a rate of 30,000 deaths per month, and almost 400,000 deaths per year. What lived experience can these numbers relate to? This does not prevent him from speaking, with Oliver Rey and others, about the idolatry of naked life and the divinization of health.

The case is interesting, because it is Illich's disciples who succumb to the fashion of covidoscepticism. On the one hand, they faithfully take up his ideas. Thus Olivier Rey: 'In the past, death was the necessary termination of earthly life, which medicine could in some cases delay. [9] Today, death is a failure of the health system. This echoes one of Illich's famous formulas, which he repeated many times: 'Do not let

has disappeared from the organism it has parasitized, making the immune system unable to distinguish the self from the non-self, brings Covid-19 closer to autoimmune diseases. These questions are very difficult, and research is far from having decided.

9 Olivier Rey, L'Idolâtrie de la vie, Gallimard, coll. « Tracts », p. 16.

us succumb to the diagnosis, but deliver us from health ailments.'[10] On the other hand, these same intellectuals separate from him on a crucial point, which touches on the alleged sacralization of life.

In the light of the Illichian critique, something seems paradoxical in the covidosceptical criticism of biopower. The latter would sacrifice everything —freedoms, the economy and even the leisure we have to think of something other than this damn pandemic[11]— to save as many lives as possible. But this goal implies that the lives we save *en masse* are of the species of "biological life", the one we share with all living beings, therefore the least specifically human. Thus, sacrificing everything to an idol, life, would make it insignificant. It should be admitted that biopower would not see the inconsistency in placing above all a value, life, which would lose all value because of the priority it is given. There are few deities who vanish when they are offered sacrifices.

But is it true that counting the dead *en masse*, a practice that did not always exist and probably dates from the French Revolution, necessarily leads to the degradation of life? It is useful to know that the First World War killed 10 million people, and the second, 60 million. It is essential to think about the fact that America, in 1961, was planning a global nuclear war that would have caused a billion deaths, or a third of the world's population at the time.[12] We cannot imagine what these figures mean, which are pure abstraction. As benchmarks, however, they are essential. It is not statistics

10 David Cayley, Entretiens avec Ivan Illich, Bellarmin, 1996.

11 Note du 1er novembre 2020 : qu'on me pardonne de songer ici au cri d'exaspération de Donald Trump, en fin de campagne électorale : « Covid, Covid, Covid ! Les médias "Fake News" n'ont que ce mot à la bouche. »

12 Daniel Ellsberg, The Doomsday Machine. Confessions of a Nuclear Planner, Bloomsbury, 2017, p. 2-3. On peut lire mon commentaire dans La Guerre qui ne peut pas avoir lieu. Essai de métaphysique nucléaire, Desclée de Brouwer, 2018, p. 31- 34.

that make all corpses interchangeable. It's war, or the epidemic.

The protagonist of Albert Camus' *Plague*, Dr. Rieux, is accused by a journalist, who is a little too sentimental, of 'living in abstraction.' The narrator, who is none other than Rieux, notes: 'Was it really an abstraction that these days spent in his hospital where the plague worked hard, bringing the average number of victims per week to five hundred? Yes, there was some abstraction and unreality in misfortune. But when abstraction begins to kill you, you must worry about abstraction.'[13]

Even assuming that biopower has the destructive effect on life and health that the critics assume, it does not follow that life does not deserve to be protected if it is attacked. This proposal would be obvious if criticism had not muddied the waters, as we have just seen, by confusing sacralization and degradation. But protecting life is exactly what Illich does by treating it as pure data and denouncing the biopower that reduces it to a material that men shape at will to satisfy their needs. It is life that Illichian criticism defends without 'idolizing it.'

13 La Peste (1947), Gallimard, coll. « Folio », 1972, p. 85.

CONCERNING LIFE: AN OPEN LETTER TO JEAN PIERRE DUPUY AND WOLFGANG PALAVER*

by David Cayley

> And the Gileadites took the fords of the Jordan against the Ephraimites. And when any of the fugitives of Ephraim said, "Let me go over," the men of Gilead said to him, "Are you an Ephraimite?" When he said, "No," they said to him, "Then say Shibboleth," and he said, "Sibboleth," for he could not pronounce it right; then then seized him and slew him in the fords of the Jordan. And there fell at that time forty-two thousand of the Ephraimites. (Judges 12: 3-6)

A shibboleth is a dividing line, and dividing lines are sharpest when they are razor thin. For the Ephraimites the price of forty-two thousand lives was nothing more than what linguists call an unvoiced fricative. Things are not yet quite so bad with us, but the pandemic has certainly brought division between friends. (And how great, after all, were the differences between Ephraimites and Gileadites, if all that distinguished them was the ability to make this crucial sound?) One of the shibboleths dividing us seems to be *life*. Recently two admired friends have taken issue with me over this word and the interpretation I have given of Ivan Illich's views on the subject. Theologian Wolfgang Palaver, in an interview in the German weekly *Die Zeit* for Dec. 23, 2020, expresses concern that Illich's claim that *life* has become "a fetish" is being abused as a justification for "sacrificing the weak." And French philosopher Jean Pierre Dupuy, in an article for the

* Editor's note: This is an edited version of Cayley's longer piece of the same title available on DavidCayley.com website and is used with his permission.

David Cayley, dccayley@gmail.com
Cayley, D. Concerning life: an open letter to Jean Pierre Dupuy and Wolfgang Palaver. Conspiratio, Fall 2021, p.59-74.

website AOC called "The True Legacy of Ivan Illich," argues, similarly, that those who follow "the fashion of covidoscepticism" misunderstand and misappropriate Illich's strictures on "the idolization of life." Dupuy's article is the second of two on the "alleged 'sacralisation of life.'" The first denounces what Dupuy calls "the blindness of the intellectuals."

In Dupuy's essay I am named in a way that flatters my achievements as an interlocutor of Illich's before I "succumbed to the times." "Alas, a thousand times alas," he says, wringing his hands sweetly over my fallen form, that "David Cayley himself" has "succumbed to the times" and now "multiplies his clichés and manifests his ignorance" while engaging in a "classic minimization of the severity of the pandemic." Palaver is milder and doesn't name me directly, but since I have been prominent amongst those who have tried to argue that "the idolization of life" has played a pernicious part in political responses to the pandemic, I include myself within that company whom he thinks have pushed Illich into dangerous territory, far beyond Illich's intention. The stakes are high here. "Saving lives" has justified every policy adopted to counteract the pandemic during the last year, and *life* is likely to continue as the sacred sign in which the revised social order that emerges from the pandemic will root its legitimacy. Accordingly, it seems important to seek some clarity on what is now meant by this word. (I hope my frequent resort to italics will be understood as a way of marking the usage I want to question). I will begin by trying to understand what is worrying Palaver and Dupuy, then present what I take to be Illich's view, and conclude with some reflection on the role of *life* in the present, and emerging, social order.

Palaver and Dupuy are concerned with what they call the protection or preservation of life. Both argue that those who "minimize" the pandemic, criticize the measures taken against it, or flout the rules for its containment are reckless-

ly endangering their neighbours. Both focus particularly on Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben as the epitome of this recklessness. Agamben has argued throughout the pandemic that the official response has amounted to destroying the village in order to save it. By leaving the old to die alone and unconsoled, by making people afraid of one another, and by banning funerals, church services and other elementary forms of social and cultural life, he has written, we have eviscerated what is left of our way of life, and allowed medicine to establish itself as an all-powerful and virtually incontestable religious cult. Dupuy is outspoken in his criticisms. Agamben's "intellectual posturing," he writes, is the "soft version" of the same "reactionary violence" as one sees in "American far-right groups…shouting, guns in hand, in front of the steps of their legislatures." This is already unfair and entirely *ad hominem*, but then Dupuy goes further. With respect to Agamben's concept of "bare life," by which Agamben clearly and explicitly means life without the cultural qualifications that give life narrative shape and dignity, Dupuy claims as an implication of this concept that Agamben must "despise… the simple, 'animal' life of the poor landless peasants of the Brazilian northeast." This seems to me to verge on slander as well as willful misreading.

Palaver, again, is milder and more temperate, but he too says that he is "upset" with Agamben. The relevant passage in Palaver's interview with *Die Zeit*: where he expresses this consternation is worth quoting in full:

> Agamben really upsets me. He is more papal than the Pope and more ecclesiastical than the Church. He claims that the Church has given up salvation and sacrificed it to health: because it sought salvation in history, it could only end in health. Nonsense! Why did Jesus heal people and take care of physical ailments? The many healings alone contradict Agamben's theological escape from the

> world. I am the LORD, your doctor. Or think of the miracle of the multiplication of bread. When people are hungry, you have to do something! Agamben practices bad theology when he tears salvation and health apart.
>
> …Agamben rightly laments an attitude for which health and survival are the most important things in life. But here one would have to ask: is it about my own life? Or is it the concern that applies to other people?

I can't overlook the possibility that this is mistranscribed, mistranslated, or just spoken hastily off the cuff, but, if this is what Palaver meant to say, I think he goes too far. Jesus certainly fed people and healed people, but he didn't heal everyone or feed everyone. Indeed he fed and healed people so sparingly that it seems fair to say that such actions, when he performed them, were intended illustratively rather than administratively or programmatically. This is the great issue in Dostoevsky's fable of the Grand Inquisitor. The Inquisitor reproaches his Lord for not turning stones into bread when he was challenged to do so. Because of this failure to allow for the weakness of suffering humanity, which cries always, "Enslave [us] but feed us!," the Inquisitor says, it was necessary for the Church to step in to "correct and improve" the Gospel. I don't mean to imply that Palaver takes his stand with the Grand Inquisitor, but only to point to a profound ambiguity in the Gospel view of Jesus as physician. Yes, there are feedings and healings, but there are also declarations that the Kingdom is "not of this world" and references to a way or a path so narrow or so arduous that "few find it." It seems unwise therefore for Palaver to accuse Agamben of a "theological escape from the world." Agamben has never claimed to be a theologian, and his defence of particular "forms of life," like funerals for the dead or human solace for the dying, seems to me eminently worldly. What he lays at the Church's door is

to have forgotten the messianic and therefore to have lost a necessary "dialectical tension" between history and what exceeds or interrupts history. It is only between "these poles," Agamben claimed in an address to "the Church of our Lord" in Paris in 2009, that "a community can form and last." Palaver may disagree, but, in that case, I would expect arguments rather than irritation and dismissal ("Nonsense!")

The second point that Palaver makes is that the masked and distanced citizen is not necessarily concerned with his own life, but with the lives of others. Dupuy says just the same – it is not for myself that I take precautions but for others. Some of this is quite uncontroversial. Long before COVID I would have declined to go out into society with an infectious disease, and hoped for the same courtesy from others. But in a world where everyone is a danger to everyone else, and the threat of "asymptomatic transmission" inhibits all social interaction without exception, it seems to me that a limit of "responsibilization" has been reached and surpassed. Reconceptualizing society as an immune system writ large is a formula for social dissolution.

Palaver argues further that those who argue against lockdown and similar measures are preparing to "sacrifice the weak." Behind this willingness he says stands "scapegoat logic" – the logic of the High Priest when he says, in the Gospel narratives of the Passion, that "it is better that one man should die than that the whole people should perish." In the understanding that Palaver shares with his teacher René Girard, this was the archaic principle — timely sacrifice preserves social order — that first Judaism and then Christianity began to question and overturn. All "utility thinking," Palaver says, reasserts "scapegoat logic." "Only life can provide orientation," he concludes. I agree, but much turns, as we shall see, on what is meant by *life*.

Before turning to Illich I can't avoid saying, though

with some trepidation, that in both Palaver and Dupuy, I feel I detect a note of panic. Once, long ago, after a lecture of Illich's on *Medical Nemesis*, a member of his audience turned to a friend of Illich's and asked in innocent perplexity, "What does he want? Let people die?" Both Dupuy and Palaver are more sophisticated, and more conversant with Illich's work, than was this bemused young man, and yet both seem, finally, to have reached the same sticking point. Lives must be saved – more or less at all costs – and anyone who argues otherwise has blindly forsaken "the height of humanism" (Dupuy) and succumbed to "scapegoat logic" and "social Darwinism." (Palaver)

Both my interlocutors believe that Illich's claim that *life* has become "an idol" and "a fetish" is being mistaken and abused by "covidosceptics." Palaver admits that Illich issued a salutary warning, but feels that Illich is being taken too prescriptively. Dupuy claims that Illich's strictures on the "idolization of life" were intended only to prevent life's degradation, not to in any way limit its protection and preservation. To get to the bottom of this we will first have to establish what Illich, in fact, said.

Sometime in 1985 a Baptist minister by the name of Will Campbell approached Illich after a lecture to a group of social workers in Macon, Georgia. In his private papers, Illich left behind a brief account, written ten years later, of this fateful meeting:

> [Following the lecture] I noticed [a] man with…a… knotted walking stick coming towards me. He introduced himself as a preacher: "Will Campbell…who has to ask you for a great favour." I gasped, because that name I knew, "If you are the one who animated Martin Luther King, do not ask me but simply command, I obey." He mumbled something which ended in "…you darn papists" and then said, "You refused to speak about

> 'life'. You see, 'life' is tearing our churches apart. "There are those who condemn capital punishment, but not the A-bomb, and others who call for the execution of abortionists. I will gather the representatives of our Churches so that you can talk to them."
>
> I was frightened. I cast about in my mind what to make of such a call. Many months later, somewhere in Ohio, I faced the room full of 'church leaders' that Campbell had assembled. The mood was tense. A clergyman in the front row identified himself as the representative of the Catholic Bishop's Conference and urged me to start with a prayer. This trap I had to refuse; I told him that I would start with a solemn, formal curse and asked those who did not stand for such a ceremony to leave. Then, dramatically, I raised my hands and repeated three times, "To Hell With Life."

Beyond the curse I do not know what Illich said on this occasion – Ohio is a big place, the meeting left no further trace in Illich's papers, and I've never encountered anyone who can tell me anything more about it – but four years later, in Chicago, Illich addressed a conference convened by the American Lutheran Church on the same subject. This lecture, called "The Institutional Construction of a New Fetish: Human Life" was published, three years later, in Illich's book, In the *Mirror of the Past*. On that occasion Illich told his auditors, without qualification, that "life is the most powerful idol the Church has had to face in her history." "More than the ideology of empire or feudal order, more than nationalism or progress, more than Gnosticism or enlightenment, the acceptance of substantive life as a God-given reality lends itself to a new corruption of the Christian faith." The word "substantive" is important here, and I will return to it in a moment, but first I want to examine the claim that contem-

porary reverence for life corrupts Christian faith.

In the gospels, Jesus asserts, repeatedly, that He is Life. "He does not say, 'I am a life,'" Illich comments. "He says, 'I am Life,' *tout court*." What is meant is more than merely being alive. The Life which Jesus incarnates and exemplifies can be given and received, Illich says, only as a gift. As such, it can be encountered, celebrated and shared, but it can never be ours to define or delimit, administer or control. This way of thinking and speaking about life, in which the word always implies a relationship to the One in whose gift Life lies, saturated the culture of Christendom for many centuries. "For much more than a millennium," Illich says, "it was quite clear that people can be among the living and be dead, and other people can be dead and have life. This is not simply a religious statement; this…became an ordinary everyday assumption." This everyday character is significant because it was Illich's argument that the "preconditions for modernity" were created by this acculturation of "Gospel truths." Modernity bent, folded and mutilated these truths, in his view, but it could never have come to be without them. This is why Illich dares to say that contemporary usage "abuses the word for the Incarnate God." He considered this a historical rather than a theological judgment. Trace the word *life* back through its many expressions in the Western theological, philosophical and scientific tradition, he said, and it will become evident that its meaning, however altered, continues to be shaped within the field that emanates from Latin Christendom.

The way we speak of life is rooted in a civilization once suffused with belief in the Incarnation. And this "Christian ancestry," is shared with "other key verities defining secular society." But at the same time the word's meaning has completely changed. It has become "substantive," Illich says. By this he means both that it has taken on the

character of a stuff – of something palpable – and that it has acquired substance in the more philosophical and theological sense of something that can exist in itself – it has become self-standing and self-sufficient. That life has become a stuff can be seen, Illich claims, in the discourses of law, medicine, economics and ecology – all of which claim this stuff as both their jurisdiction and their justification. The law protects it – in several U.S. states one can even sue for "wrongful life" – medicine extends it – corporations administer it – as manpower or human resources – and ecology studies it. The science of genetics now knows its "language." Demography and journalism tirelessly count its units. Lives lost index disaster; lives saved index social progress. The pursuit of health prolongs it; technology enhances it. Life is known, as never before and it is managed, as never before.

But, at the same time, life transcends all management as what Illich calls a "fetish." This was a favourite word, chosen more for its power to shock than for any particular anthropological resonance. A fetish is a magical object with the power of channelling or fixating certain feelings. "Technological society," he says, "is singularly incapable of generating myths to which people can form deep and rich attachments." And yet such a society, just for its "rudimentary maintenance," requires some way of commanding sentimental and not just rational allegiance. This is the role of the fetish. It is "a Linus blanket…that we can drag around to feel like decent defenders of sacred values." Life is managed as a biopolitical resource, but, as a fetish, it is also something that can be "spoken about in hushed tones as something mysterious, polymorphic, weak, demanding tender protection." What Illich calls 'epistemic sentimentality" can thus attach itself to *life*, at the same time that *life* is being intensively managed. To live under the sign of *life* is to become adept at eliding these seemingly contradictory connotations. One learns to slide

smoothly from one to the other without this operation ever having to come into consciousness as such. With a single verbal gesture, we revere what we manage, and manage what we revere.

Life, Illich says, "tends to void" both the moral and the legal "concept of a person." For him, it is in "the notion of 'person' [that] the humanism of Western humanism is anchored." A person possesses a clear boundary, and an inviolable integrity. A life does not. One is a person; one can, as the saying goes, "get a life." Lives can be evaluated and improved in ways that persons cannot. A doctor, facing me as a person, faces a certain story and a certain unknown destiny – there is a lot he or she must learn in order to treat me. A doctor facing me as a life can discern everything he or she needs to know from my test results. Lives vary, of course, as the skillful physician will recognize, but not quite in the same way that persons vary.

Life, for Illich, was also the sign of a profound change in "religiosity" – a term that he used to refer to the feelings, gestures and barely conscious dispositions that might not be captured by the more formal word religion. "My nose, my intuition, and also my reason tell me," he said in 1992, "that we might be at a historical threshold, a watershed, a point of transition to a new stage of religiosity." This idea had first taken hold of him a couple of years earlier, he told me, while he stood in the kitchen of the apartment of a group of graduate students whom he was visiting:

> On the icebox door two pictures were pasted. One was the blue planet and one was the fertilized egg. Two circles of roughly the same size – one bluish, the other one pink. One of the students said to me, "These are our doorways to the understanding of life." The term *doorway* struck me profoundly. This stuck with me for quite a few months, until, for a totally different reason, I…took down

> a book of Mircea Eliade[‘s]. Eliade has been for many of us a teacher of religious science…And, going though this book, I came to the conclusion that better than anyone else I had studied he brings out the concept of *sacrum*. The term *sacrum*, the Latin noun corresponding to our *sacred*, has been used by religious scientists to describe a particular place in the topology of any culture. It refers to an object, a locality, or a sign which, within that culture, is believed to be – this young lady was right – a doorway. I had always thought of it as a threshold, a threshold at which the ultimate appears, that which, within that society, is considered to be true otherness, that which, within a given society, is considered transcendent. For Eliade, a society becomes a conscious unity not just in relation to neighboring societies – we are not *you* – but also by defining itself in relation to what’s beyond.

The pink disk and the blue disk, Illich concluded, performed, very precisely, the function Eliade described. Just as much as the megaliths at Stonehenge, the Ka’bah in Mecca, or the *omphalos* of the earth at ancient Delphi, they were *sacrums*. But, as “emblems for scientific facts,” they were *sacrums* of an entirely new kind. The “ultimate ‘’ which appeared at earlier “doorways” beckoned from a beyond that was transcendent – the opposite and other of this world with which it was understood to be radically discontinuous. What appears in the doorway of the two disks is more of the same – a realm of the invisibly small or the invisibly large to which we can gain access only with electron microscopes or the vast explosive power required to overcome gravity but which is yet no different than what is at hand. The doorways at which *life* is experienced and understood are, in Illich’s words, “a frontier with no beyond.” Like the endless virtuality that extends beyond the computer screen, they open to an infinity without difference. The new religiosity he had discovered was a “spir-

ituality" of pure immanence, in which virtual objects, conjured out of the womb of technology, present both a here and a beyond at once.

Life as pure immanence is uniquely available – it opens itself to microphones and cameras, microscopes and scanners. *Life* is at our command, even as we are at *life*'s command. We manage what we praise, administer what we venerate. Both aspects are at play in the notion of responsibility for *life* which has played such an important role in the discourses of the pandemic and which seems to be the main concern of both my interlocutors. Palaver says, "We are responsible for each other's life. It is our highest responsibility, for which we may even have to sacrifice our lives." Dupuy evokes "the risk of infecting one's loved ones" as the standard one should apply to one's own behaviour. To criticize either the ideological construction of the pandemic or the counter-productive measures adopted against it is to flirt with irresponsibility – the reckless disregard for the lives of others which both Dupuy and Palaver deprecate and fear. But the word *responsibility*, according to Illich, is something of a trap – a word that's easier to get into than to get out of. The key issue for him is whether the thing for which I am said to be responsible is within my reach, within my power, and within my understanding. "*Responsibility* catches," he says, by imputing to the one being made responsible some imaginary power– it might be the power to overcome racism, save life on earth, or end the pandemic by staying home. But very often Illich says this power "turns out to be phoney." And that makes responsibility "the ideal base on which to build the new religiosity of which I speak, in the name of which people become more than ever administrable, manageable."

No challenge is offered here to behaviour that is prudent, considerate or courteous. Illich's concern was with illusion, moral grandiosity and epistemological confusion. Illich

regarded *life* as an idol – a man-made god in whose form we worship ourselves, while at the same time generating a sacred which mandates and justifies our manipulation of living. He claimed that *life* had become the object and anchor of "a new stage of religiosity" – a further perversion of the Biblical understanding of life as an implication of God's breath. He thought that life had become a "substantive" – a stuff to be counted and conserved, a resource to be enhanced and administered. He held that the idea of each one as a person – an unrepeatable and inscrutable being pervaded by a "mysterious historicity" – was being replaced by system concepts in which individuality dissolves. And he believed finally that the word *life* had become the site of a fateful "conceptual collapse of the borderline" between "model and reality" and between "process and substance." This collapse is expressed in our thinking that in becoming the protectors, champions and devotees of life we have touched *life itself* without remainder, reservation or detour.

How does all this pertain to the present situation, and to the fears of my interlocutors that Illich is being recklessly misappropriated by Dupuy's "covidoskeptics." Illich's "new stage of religiosity," centred on *life*, is not easy to perceive as such. Some committed members of the Abrahamic faiths that centre life in the One in whom "we live and move and have our being" may notice it, since, for them, the preservation and prolongation of life is neither an exclusive good nor the highest good. But,.for those who live within the horizons of the new religiosity, *life* must necessarily take the form of something obvious and unquestionable. When I spoke recently to a surgeon who wanted to convince me to have a surgery which he believed would extend my "life expectancy," I had the impression that he simply could not understand how any other object – a seeking after the proper "hour of my death" for example – was even possible. Life, for him, is an

unlimited good, death an unqualified evil. Whatever is made sacred becomes untouchable and unquestionable. Before *life*, as that precious stuff which we must at all hazards save, all must bow and fall silent. This allows government to go on *behind a veil*, as it were. The image is precise inasmuch as it was a veil which sheltered the Holy of Holies from view in the Second Temple in Jerusalem. (And even more precise when one considers that it was this veil which the Gospels say was torn in two at the hour of the Crucifixion, profaning the old sacred and opening the door, eventually, to our reverence for life-in-itself, life as its own god.) I believe that during the last year people have been made less competent, less aware, more frightened and more prone to ritualism and sentimentality. Fatal myths, like the myth of Science, have been strengthened. More people have been consigned to the new proletariat whose only remaining job is to collect welfare, consume entertainment and cheer on command. The World Economic Forum has been emboldened to cook up its Great Reset by which monopoly capitalism will be finally made indistinguishable from socialism. Disabling professional hegemonies have been reinforced. Difficult conversations – about vaccination, let's say – have been made more difficult, if not impossible, by reckless polarization. The sovereign who authorizes these developments is *Life*, and the attendant minor divinities who carry its train, like risk, safety and management. I believe that Illich saw this coming, and that I remain in tune with him on this point.

Earlier I told the story of the young man who wondered, after listening to Illich lecture on *Medical Nemesis* whether Illich's proposal was to "let people die." I'm sure the same question could now be asked of me. It's a strange question become it implies that it's up to me, or Illich, or whoever else might be challenged in this way, to allow or not allow death. Ancient images of the Fates show them spinning and

cutting the cloth of destiny, allotting each one an unchangeable portion at birth. The contemporary image is the opposite. Nothing determines our fates except the vigilance of the institutions that protect us. We will live until, at the termination of treatment, we are "let" die. The hubris of this image mirrors the fatalism of the earlier one. Illich was a man of "the middle way," which for him meant not mediocrity but the razor's edge of constantly renewed discernment. He did not advocate wantonly letting people die, and no more did he advocate keeping them alive whatever the cost. Nothing will tell us in advance where the balance should lie, but we will certainly never find it by outlawing discussion.

The idea that life and death, or good and evil are inextricably tangled in the world is not a new idea and should not be a controversial one. Christians have the parable of the wheat and the tares to teach it to them; Buddhists have the idea that good and evil are of "co-dependent origin." Only in a civilization completely seized by what Illich once called "a compulsion to do good" would this idea require defense or explication. But, having to defend it puts the defender in the peculiar position of seeming to speak for whatever evil the latest war is supposedly rooting out. I believe it was Illich's view, expressed in his wonderful essay "Research by People," that a rough and ready distinction can be drawn between technology that "remedies" certain ills and incommodities of the human condition and technology that aims, in Francis Bacon's words, at "mastery over nature." This idea of technology as remedy which he ascribes to Hugh of St. Victor, is as close as he ever came, and as close as he thought he was ever likely to come, to specifying a principle of enoughness, sufficiency or limit on which a new post-Promethean, post-Baconian philosophy of technology could be founded. However, this principle is construed it will certainly stipulate things not to be done as well as things to be done. *Life*, on the other

hand, exerts an unlimited demand. It is the monotonous, unshadowed and endless good that corrupted Christianity bequeaths to modernity. In the last year we have pursued it as never before and without even noticing the watershed that is being crossed. To "save lives" we have turned the world upside down, accepting censorship and intrusive social control, abandoning the old, and immolating the economically marginal. We have allowed a further mythification of what was already badly mythified – Science as an immaculately conceived and infallible oracle. We have opened the door to intensive virtualization, increased fear, and injured conviviality. Was it worth it? I would try to start the debate if only the new sovereign had not made debate illegal during a war.

Thematic Articles

On Reading Ivan Illich

READING IVAN ILLICH*

by Lee Hoinacki

On various occasions, I have set out on the perilous enterprise of attempting to interpret Ivan Illich. One day an astute questioner angered me, blurting out, "Oh, so you produce Cliffs Notes!"[1] After calming down I thought about her comment and concluded that, Yes, I did indeed want to do something like that; I believed this could be an honest work. After nearly forty years of knowing Illich, and discussing his writings with others, I think that a certain kind of midwifery can be enlightening, both for me and for his readers.

People sometimes regard Illich as if he were a social critic, or a historian, or a philosopher, or — more rarely —a theologian. But starting with one of these categories, many go astray. Illich has not produced a coherent social theory; he has not written a major historical study; he will not be remembered as an important twentieth-century philosopher. But he has made startling contributions in each of these areas. For example, the critical outline described in *Deschooling Society* (1971) enables the perceptive reader to see the structure and myths that drive the beliefs of modern society. Those unfamiliar with the tradition of apophatic theology mistakenly view the book as only about schools. *Tools for Conviviality* (1973), with its dimensional analysis, goes far to suggest a sensitive

* From: *The Challenges of Ivan Illich* (eds) Carl Mitcham & Lee Hoinacki, (SUNY Press, 2002. pp 1-7). Editor's note: The last paragraph of the original essay has been deleted in this version. That paragraph referred to the motives of the authors contributing to the collection of essays gathered in The Challenges of Ivan Illich.

1 The trade name of a series of synopses of, for example, Shakespeare; using them, students may be able to pass exams without having read the original.

Hoinacki, L. Reading Ivan Illich.
Conspiratio, Fall 2021, p.79-89.

and complex theory of the Western tool, today called technology. Critics of the medical system can still profit from the most revelatory notion in *Medical Nemesis* (1976) —cultural iatrogenesis. If Illich's general thesis in *Gender* (1982) is accurate, much of the social and economic history of western Europe should be interpreted differently. People bothered by religious questions often note that he is a perceptive commentator on Sacred Scripture, that he sometimes speaks to them with disturbing insight.

The first difficulty in approaching him is that people look in the wrong direction —they look toward Illich. In this respect, the example of Soren Kierkegaard is instructive. Kierkegaard held that one could not examine his body of writing as if one were reading a textbook on physics or literary criticism. One could only reach a verdict on the truth of what he wrote by responding out of one's own individual existence. The issue is not one of objective verification, but of subjective simplicity or purity.

Apropos of this view, Illich himself suggests that the entire question of an object in the modern sense, leading to the notion of hard objectivity or "objective truth"—that is, separated from the person presumably knowing-may find its origin in the thirteenth century.[2] This kind of objectivity contributed greatly to the creation of contemporary science and to the disembodiment of a sensuous universe. Most viciously and destructively, it continually arises in the way many people instinctively view the other, whether that other is intimate or stranger. Because of this radical disconnection of seer and seen, many are easily seduced to believe that it is legitimately progressive and productively efficient to instrumentalize all of creation: nature "out there," in the other, or in oneself.

2 Ivan Illich, In the Vineyard of the Text: A Commentary to Hugh's Didascalicon (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 64, n. 54.

Throughout his writings, Illich peremptorily rejects the kind of dichotomization that leads to such an aberration.[3]

Writers, such as Donna Haraway, who look critically at contemporary science point out some of the nefarious consequences deriving from this sort of objectivity[4]. But many readers of books are infected by the prodigious successes of modern science, no less than by the spirit and ideals of the Enlightenment. Kierkegaard is a kind of anomaly, awkwardly at odds with the ideas of progress predominant in the nineteenth century. Illich is not a twentieth-century Kierkegaard, but his life and work call for a stance similar to that demanded by Kierkegaard. Unless I proceed in this way, I will never grasp the import of Illich's criticism of the Western experiment.

A reading that objectifies Illich's books, isolating them from myself, from where I am, from the way I live, begins as a performance in dilettantism and ends as a feeble exercise in futility. Illich-as with any person-cannot be subjected to some assessment according to an objective, impersonal, universal standard. Adolf Hitler's diagnostic treatment of homosexuals and Jews exhibited not just the criminality but also the sinfulness of a universalizing procedure. Along with certain other persons— with whom he shares important affinities and experiences—Illich presents a discomfiting challenge to readers and friends: the more acute and painful, the more one gets closer to him and his writing.

3 See his remarks in Ivan Illich and Barry Sanders, ABC: The Alphabetization of the Popular Mind (San Francisco: North Point, 1988), pp. 119- 127; Ivan Illich, Gender (New York: Pantheon, 1982), especially pp. 74, 75 (the Notes), and 146 (the text); also, Lee Hoinacki, "Friendship in the Writings of Ivan Illich," unpublished manuscript, 1995.

4 Donna J. Haraway, Modes_tWitness@Second_Millennium (New York: Routledge, 1997); for example, see pp. 23-39.

For many, Illich incarnates the character of witness; he bears witness against our time. To recognize and grasp his unique fit in that place, one can look at some of the likenesses and differences between him and two other contemporary witnesses: Paul Celan and Primo Levi. I assume that the notion of witness today conjures up the specter of twentieth-century abominations. These two men, who with Illich also experienced the frightful maliciousness of fallen humans, help to situate him because of their proximity in ethnic origin, physical geography, and historical time. Celan and Levi, too, were Europeans who were privileged with a profound immersion in the disciplines of Western high culture.[5] These men, directly, in their flesh, were pierced with what many judge to be the overarching evil of recent Western history, the hatreds and lethal power of National Socialism[6]. Their act of witnessing was expressed indomitably and poignantly in language; they struggled to bequeath a literary monument testifying to the enigmatic monstrousness of our age.

Illich, while also experiencing in his family and flesh the same venom spurting out of delusionary sin, has not sought to be, like Levi, a chronicler of explicit cruelty and obdurate hardness of heart.[7] From his writings, one sees that Illich focuses on something else, something truly beyond the depravity of National Socialism, but also more subtle and hidden. He sees what Karl Marx completely missed-and was brutally attacked by Marxists when that ideology was still

5 See, for example, Paul Celan, Poems of Paul Celan, trans. Michael Hamburger (New York: Persea Books, 1989); Primo Levi, The Drowned and the Saved, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Summit Books, 1988); Marco Belpoliti, ed., Primo Levi (Milan: Marcos y Marcos, 1998).

6 Although Illich has also been affected by his experiences in places as diverse as India, Japan, and Latin America, I confine my perspective to what occurred to him in his early years in Austria, Dalmatia, and Italy.

7 See David Cayley, Ivan Illich in Conversation (Concord, Ontario: Anansi, 1992), pp. 1-2, 79-80. This book is the best introduction to and overview of Illich's life and work.

the fashion. He forcefully uncovers what Martin Heidegger only murkily ruminated about. The tools of the modern world-the world created by what Jacques Ellul recognized as la *technique*, the world of an all-encompassing instrumentalization —"create" a universe utterly transcending the conflict between social classes.[8] Tools/technologies form an all-embracing world independent of nationalist or ethnic passions, a world whose hubris recognizes no limits, indeed, a world beyond the hegemony of *homo economicus*, a juggernaut to which both men and women now rush to sacrifice themselves. Nearly all have submerged themselves in *la technique*, instrumentalizing even love and reflection, thereby losing the wonders and joys of committed fidelity and contemplative idleness.

Facing this world, Illich could not follow the example of men such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Franz Jagerstatter.[9] One could no longer be a witness by submitting one's neck to the executioner's garrote. After all, the only sense of witness is to bear witness. Although many did not want to admit the truth of what Bonhoeffer and Jagerstatter died for, those whose moral sensibility had not been completely corroded or corrupted could see what was going on; the evidence of wickedness was not hidden from them. Illich, however, faces a different perversion of the truth: He has to testify against almost everything that people, from pope through respected citizen to street corner drug pusher, regard as the marvels of modern civilization- the impressive and attractive accomplishments of education, transport, medicine, social services, and communications. He calls

8 Jacques Ellul, The Technological Society (New York: Random House, 1964); and Jacques Ellul, The Technological Bluff (Grand Rapids, Ml: Eerdmans, 1990).

9 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison (New York: Macmillan, 1972); Gordon Zahn, In Silent Witness (Springfield, IL: Templegate,1986).

into question the most noteworthy and awesome triumphs of human ingenuity, devices producing "goods" and services, hardware and software, instruments designed to control micro or macro universes.

The third edition of *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* lists one direct sentence from Illich: "In a consumer society there are inevitably two kinds of slaves, the prisoners of addiction and the prisoners of envy."[10]In these words, the compilers catch one of his crucial and cutting insights: Many, perhaps most persons, in modern societies have delivered themselves over to a kind of servitude that both binds and blinds. Faced with this depressing historical novelty, where can one stand? What can one possibly say? Can one only turn to the example of Don Quixote and learn to be a modern clown? Some novelists have imagined this option.[11]

To express his own perceptions and understanding, Illich had to forge the concepts to make known what he believed to be happening in the contemporary world.

Why do the most privileged people in history choose slavery? His conceptual repertoire is rich and varied, his insights often sharp and subtle, and he has published a number of essays and short books. But his writing is characterized more by brilliant epigrammatic judgments, such as *Tools of Conviviality*, rather than by conventional or linear argument.

Illich does construct his own kind of argument, however, around one key notion —ritual —and unerringly reveals the frightening power of the world's most ambitious and prestigious institutions to seduce the "favored" who participate in those institutions. In a disenchanted world, people above all

10 Ivan Illich, Tools for Conviviality (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 47; The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 270.

11 See, for example, John Kennedy Toole, A Confederacy of Dunces (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1987); and Heinrich Boll, The Clown (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971). The major such tale in modern literature is Fyodor Dostoyevsky's The Idiot.

hunger for the reassuring order, the drama, the magic enclosure, the alembic of a ritual.

As he pointed out early in his public writing, it does not make any difference whether, for example, a school is in a miserable ghetto or a luxurious estate, whether it is "traditional" or "free," whether organized by a totalitarian or democratic regime, it does and teaches exactly the same thing: there is always the hidden curriculum.[12] In some of his latest work, he continues to point out the power of ritual, for example, in all diagnostic and counselling encounters in an increasingly therapeutic-making-sick society.[13]

Socrates understood the power of the spoken word.[14] At the other center forming the matrix of Western awareness of "what is," so did Jesus of Nazareth. Many have pointed out that neither Socrates nor Jesus wrote anything.[15] Historically, both Athens and Jerusalem agreed on the critical and decisive character of language. The question, however, repeatedly arises: What is the reality of language, whence comes its power? According to one interpretation, a tradition begun in ancient Israel reached its perfection in the doxologic mode of speech found, for example, in the Roman Ritual of the high Middle Ages. This specific view holds that Christianity, in the Roman rite, extended and perfected the Platonic doxologic account of purpose in language. Language primarily exists and, fi-

12 Ivan Illich, Deschooling Society (New York: Harper and Row, 1971). As the title implies, Illich's interest in writing this book is not in the school, as such. This is also true with the other institutions he examines in later books.

13 At the moment (early 2001), this work has only reached the discussion and early draft stages.

14 See Plato, Phaedrus, 274 to the end.

15 The exceptions only confirm the point: "But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger" John 8:6). Socrates drew a geometric figure-I assume, in the sand- for the slave boy of Meno (Plato, Meno, 82-86).

nally, only has meaning, in praise of the divine.[16] Ritual language, then, can be powerful beyond all power because of its transcendent dimension; its counterfeits can be frightening because they sometimes successfully mimic a true doxologic language. Here one can feel the fire of the demonic.[17]

Illich was trained in ecclesiology and was especially intrigued by liturgy.[18] He understood, I would argue, that the most ominous expression of secularization in the West was not the death of nature (although this was related), nor a misnamed materialism, nor sexual "freedom," but the decline of liturgy, the routinization and emptying out of religious ritual in the churches. As he suggests, this process began with clerical actions to establish various assured institutional responses to God's calling, later legitimated by a juridical or legal order; men hesitated to rest all hope on gratuitous gifts of grace. Illich captures the denouement of this lack of faith with the ancient Latin adage *corruptio optimi quae est pessima* (the corruption of the best turns out to be the worst). He has attempted to show that this apothegm accurately reveals the origins of "normative notions of a cruelty, of a *horrifying* darkness, which no other culture has ever known."[19] Fyodor Dostoyevsky, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, portrays institutional mistrust as a demonic temptation in Ivan's poem, "The Grand Inquisitor," perhaps literature's most terrifying image

16 For a recent and impressive study of the tradition, see Catherine Pickstock, After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998). The actual expression of doxologic language today can most often be found, that is, experienced, in the Orthodox churches.

17 Although listening to the radio was an important pastime in our small-town mid western household when I was growing up, I remember only one broadcast almost as if it were yesterday: one of Hitler's speeches. I must have been ten or twelve, could not understand a word, but also could not change the station or turn off the old Atwater-Kent.

18 See Cayley, Ivan Illich in Conversation, pp. 65-66.

19 Ibid., p. 213. Emphasis in original. See also pp. 242- 243.

of the betrayal of the freedom graciously given to people by Jesus.

The historical record appears to establish conclusively that people and ritual go together. Part of the genius of modern institutions is that they developed rituals that speak to every aspect of peoples' desires: to vanity, to the love of beauty, to the pursuit of truth and order, to all sensual delights and, coming full circle to the origins of humans — according to scientific criteria —they especially speak to fear.[20]

Illich has pointed out, again and again, that modern rituals, no matter the degree of sophistication found in their design and operation, lead inevitably to some kind of slavery.

> [The school is] the locus of the ritual which reproduces and veils the disparities between myth and reality. [It is] the central social ritual (p. 54)
>
> Of course, school is not, by any means, the only modern institution which has as its primary purpose the shaping of man's vision of reality. But school enslaves more profoundly and more systematically, since only school is credited with the principal function of forming critical judgment and, paradoxically, tries to do so by making learning about oneself, about others, and about nature depend on a prepackaged process. (p. 68)
>
> Once young people have allowed their imaginations to be formed by curricular instruction, they are conditioned to institutional planning of every sort. (p. 56)
>
> The man addicted to being taught seeks his security in compulsive teaching. (p. 57)[21]

20 Thinkers in the Christian tradition have discussed the gift of discernment: the ability to distinguish divine from diabolic internal movements. The gift enables one to recognize truth and falsity in ritual today.

21 Illich, Deschooling Society. He writes about the power of ritual throughout his works, but his initial presentation of the thesis is found in Deschooling Society. See

People of every nation are proud of their "good" schools, embarrassed by the bad ones; so it goes with other modern institutions as well. Illich, however, sees something else: a picture of universal misery, imposed with the power, at times apparently fiendish, of clever rituals. Contemplating this desolate landscape, he has chosen to stand by that most ephemeral of realities, the word. In one of his most striking statements, written at the end of *Tools for Conviviality*, he says:
I feel almost unbearable anguish when faced by the fact that only the word recovered from history should be left to us as the power for stemming disaster.[22]

To take up words, he collapses three historical figures —poet, clown, and prophet— into one, making up his one voice. The very trope illustrates a characteristic of his method.

> Poets and clowns have always risen up [to oppose oppression]
> They demonstrate the follies of seriousness ...
> The prophet can denounce creeds and expose superstitions.[23]

Here one sees the way Illich often proceeds-more by way of acute assertion than by sustained argument. But the assertions have a grounding, deep sources in both ancient Western traditions and contemporary insights. Some of the essays included in this volume explore these traditions, others the insights. The authors, taken together, manifest a polyphonic texture of voices through their focus and approach, their re-

also Cayley, Ivan Illich in Conversation, p. 66.

22 Illich, Tools for Conviviality, p. 119.

23 Ibid., p. 65.

spective style and interest and, thereby, reflect various facets of Illich's influence.

Because of his rootedness in his own tradition, Illich knows that no word or action is complete on its own. The current running through everything Illich writes and does is an anticipatory belief in his action's ultimate eschatological consummation.[24] The power of his practice-in life and art-derives from his recognition that he faces a crisis, that is, a crossroad. There are only two choices for him: Either he follows the contemporary world in its postmodern acedia, or spineless boredom, sauntering toward nihilism, or he lives in hope, eyes fixed on a future eschaton. Illich detailed the first option in his book Tools for Conviviality. He expressed the foundational germ of the second option in his early essay "Rebirth of Epimethean Man."[25]

24 See Pickstock's comments in After Writing, p. 221.

25 This essay serves as the concluding chapter to Deschooling Society. It suggests the most fundamental position of his life and work.

HOW TO READ IVAN ILLICH

by Neto Leão

Introduction

There is no obvious answer to the question of how to read Ivan Illich. Although his writings pertain to many academic disciplines —from economics to urban planning— they cannot be filed under a specific subject area much less an academic category, whether the humanities or the social sciences. Though his concerns ranged across centuries —from the ninth century Latin Church to Brazilian politics of the twentieth —and though he wrote a dissertation on Arnold Toynbee, and though he claimed in his later books to write as a historian, he was not recognized by the fraternity of academic historians. Though certified as a philosopher his writings do not constitute a philosophy – whether systematic as in Kant or aphoristic as in Nietzsche – nor are they directly about traditional topics in philosophy such as metaphysics, logic, or epistemology. Even if he died an ordained priest he did not write as a theologian, as did for instance, Jacques Maritan, Gustavo Gutiérrez, or Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Finally, his personal life and experiences are too rich and varied — including being the founder of the Puerto Rican festival in New York and being hounded by the CIA—to permit his thought and writings to be reduced to psychological or biographical imperatives.

Therefore, it seems necessary to suspend all prejudices – pre-judgments – when reading Ivan Illich. Even a causal reader of Illich cannot avoid noticing the tenor and topic of his writings suggest a man urgently confronting concrete sit-

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uations. It alerts the reader to approach the text not simply as intellectual productions but rather as thoughts crafted to illuminate and to clarify lived experience. I am convinced that to read Ivan Illich appropriately necessitates listening to what he says and not only reading what he writes. Let the reader be warned: this opinion was shaped by the encounter with the first Illich book I carefully read in 2015. Celebration of Awareness: a call for institutional revolution (1969), made me feel like he was in a conversation with me, like he was speaking to me, as if the pages carried the breath of the spoken word. Where I stand today has been defined by that gripping experience, which sent me on a pilgrimage to search for his friends, collaborators, and students as part of the continuing quest to better listen to his words. I disclose this to acknowledge what his long-time friend, Lee Hoinacki, cautioned: "A reading that objectifies Illich's books, isolating them from myself, from where I am, from the way I live, begins as a performance in dilettantism and ends as a feeble exercise in futility."[1]

Three lines of force

I propose that to read Illich well the reader must be attuned to the crisscrossing of three lines of force that charge Illich's texts. These three intersecting and intertwining lines emerge from a 'diagonal' reading. A diagonal reading does not ferret out what might be hidden between the lines but seeks to discover the lines of force that animate what is written. This does not mean that such lines of force are invented by the reader. Instead, they can be substantiated through a careful exegesis of the texts. Moreover, such attention will also reveal, to the alert reader, knots of the text wherein the

1 Hoinacki, Lee. Reading Ivan Illich, in (Eds) Lee Hoinacki and Carl Mitcham, The Challenges of Ivan Illich. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002.

three lines combine to disclose the standpoint of the writer himself. The purpose of this article is to make plausible these claims.[2]

The theological is the first of the forces animating the writings of Illich. To properly grasp the written words of Illich, the reader cannot be deaf to the Word, as explained in Christian theology. What Illich says in his commentary on reading St. Victor's Didascalicon applies as much to reading his own writings: "the philosopher taught the goal of learning was wisdom as the perfect good, and Christians accept the revelation that this perfect good consists in the Word of God made Flesh."

The second line of force shaping what Illich writes is the personal, which has to do with his stance or attitude. He was a man who lived in hope and tried to avoid expectations; he was in the world and not of it. He suffered this paradox because he was fully aware that it was not a problem to be solved. In a world increasingly reshaped by man into a technological womb, Illich tried to live in a way that allowed for the gratuitous experience of freedom.

The third line of force forming much of Illich's writings is the practical. Illich wanted to influence his readers, which is why he wrote public texts. He engaged with the historically specific conditions of his time, acting as a public intellectual and even as a militant thinker. Widely lauded and occasionally decried as a savage social critic, Illich's pages are public documents that aim to awaken readers to their lived conditions.

2 I owe to Sajay Samuel the clarity of this proposition of how to read Illich. After reading my first draft of this essay, Sajay was able to see the potential within my arguments and helped me to clarify them by suggesting the structure of the three lines of force. He saw what was implicit and scattered throughout the text and helped me to find a better way to construct the argument. The quality of its construction and presentation is my responsibility.

These three lines of force sometimes condense into textual knots. Such knots in the text not only expose these three lines of force but in doing so, also discloses the stance of the writer as one faithfully consigned to the hands of God. Consider for example the sentence that ends his recently republished essay on The Powerless Church: "I want to celebrate my faith for no purpose at all."[3] It is a statement that not only indicates the personal stance of a theologically cultured person. The sentence also has a practical orientation insofar as it is part of an explicit call to action addressed to both the church hierarchs and the laity. As such, it is a sentence that condenses the theological, personal, and practical lines of force that, arguably, shape all Illich's writings.

The theological line

Illich was a man of faith and, as he described himself, "faith is a mode of knowledge which does not base itself on either my worldly experience or the resources of my intelligence. It founds certainty on the word of someone whom I trust and makes this knowledge which is based on trust more fundamental than anything I can know by reason. This, of course, is a possibility only when I believe that God's word can reach me."[4]

The incarnation of the verb is at the heart of the Christian gospel. Unlike the veneration of a distant and unreachable god, the incarnate verb can be loved in the flesh. The first epistle of St. John the evangelist gives a beautiful testimony to the tangibility of God's word. "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with

3 Illich, Ivan. The Powerless Church, in (Eds) Valentina Borremans & Sajay Samuel The Powerless Church and other selected writings: 1955-1985 (Pennsylvania State University Press, State College, 2018).

4 Cayley, David. The Rivers North of the Future: the testament of Ivan Illich as told to David Cayley. Toronto: House of Anansi, 2005, p. 57.

our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life" (1 John, 1-2). For Illich, the verb that became flesh is infused into historical time as the spoken word, the conversation, the discourse, the aula which, as a public event, is potentially also a political event. It is for this reason that Illich is both deeply attentive to how he writes and to how he speaks. For example, his hesitance in front of the microphone or other amplifying devices cannot be understood except as the consequence of a theological fidelity to the carnal limits of voice. As he suggests, words retain their carnality when they are spoken by a mouth and heard by a fleshy ear. In contrast, nowadays, most of the words a person hears today neither emanate from mouths nor are addressed to specific persons.[5]

Illich need not have written a word. He could have been as the messenger who announces the Word orally. However, he did write. As persuasively argued by Walter J. Ong, which Illich expands on in The Vineyard of the Text, the written text is fundamentally different from the spoken word since the first is permanent while the second disappears even as it is pronounced. Yet, Illich has remarked that he did not speak except as he wrote.[6] Accordingly, in Illich, speech and writing are as one. This means not only that the written texts of Illich attempt the impossible feat of expressing the lived voice. It also implies a second impossibility – that his written texts should be read except as if spoken. Illich's insistence on the paradoxical interconvertibility of his written text and his speech can only be grasped within the theological horizon of

5 Illich, Ivan, Loudspeaker on the Tower: Belfry and Minaret (2000), unpublished manuscript.

6 In conversation with David Cayley, Illich disclosed "I've never written a line which I have the feeling I could have said. And people don't notice the difference between my speaking and my writing. They aren't aware how much, given my destiny, speaking obliges me to read off internal lines" (Cayley, 1992, p. 202).

the verb that became flesh. For as he said, "history becomes possible only when the Word turns into words."[7] To appreciate his writings, a reader must be attuned to Illich's effort to write with embodied words. A clue to such a manner of reading can be gleaned from Illich's commentary on Lectio Divina in which he underscores reading as an ascetical practice that allows the reader to taste the voice impressed on the page, to savor the spirit between words, which cannot breathe unless the words are pronounced.

The personal line

The power of Illich's writings and his practices in the arts of suffering and of dying derive from the self-recognition that he confronted a crisis, that is, a crossroads. For Hoinacki, there were only two choices for Illich: either he would follow the contemporary world in the direction of its postmodern acedia, or spineless boredom, sauntering towards nihilism or he lives in hope, his eyes fixed on a future eschaton (ἔσχατος). In the past, acedia was part of the list of capital sins. The monk Evagrius Ponticus includes it in a list of eight capital sins. The one we have today – sloth – combines acedia (ακηδία) and laziness (οκνηρός) in the same term. However, the differences are considerable. Laziness is a matter of behavior, whereas acedia refers to the state of mind that leads to a 'sadness of the world.' It takes hold of the man denuding all his joie de vivre and throws him into the darkness of someone who has cut his own wings and cannot fly anymore. Dante defines acedia as the inability to love that leads to the complete despair and eventually suicide.

In contrast, the manner of living in hope to which Illich was called can be read in the afterword of Deschool-

7 Illich, Ivan; Sanders, Barry. ABC: The Alphabetization of the Popular Mind. San Francisco: North Point Press, 1988, p. 3.

ing Society (1971), entitled The Rebirth of the Epimethean Man. For Illich, hope is distinct from both a cheery optimism, which is indistinguishable from a romance with illusion, and the anesthesia of the soul, which is now called positive thinking. Illich lived hope in its strongest sense, as an abiding faith in the goodness of nature. Hope is an attitude towards life, a stance, a way of being in the world. Hope is nothing to do with expectations which are based on a more or less accurate forecasts and predictions of imagined futures.

In fact, Illich makes a very clear distinction between hope and expectation. Such ideas as "development" and "progress" express the attempt to replace the hope of achieving what is good with the expectation that needs will be met. Such notions promise and even guarantee a heaven on earth made by the powers of science, technology, and political economy to permanently break the constraints of natural thresholds. Illich follows this argument by emphatically clarifying that expectations refer to a "not yet" other than hope. Hope guides in the direction of the unpredictable, the unexpected, and leaves open the possibility to be surprised. In the last analysis, hope is grounded in another's word. Expectations are based on managerial promises of unfolding development, endless improvement, ceaseless progress, and soluble problems. Expectations are grounded in claiming the right for services or goods delivered by an impersonal system that produces and distributes health, education, security, among other things. In this sense, hope confronts the unknown while expectations manage the unlikely. The one dwells in grace, the other rests on probability. Hope is rooted in the personal relationship with a friend whereas expectations are tethered to institutionalized roles. To live in hope means to dwell in the world knowing it is a gift from God and therefore to not be fully of it.

But what does Illich mean by gift?[8] Gift carries the sense of the gratuitous, of that which is given freely without obligations. The appropriate attitude towards a freely given gift is surprise. The cultivation of surprise before what is freely given and the clearing the obstacles to experience such surprise accounts for the personal line of force animating the writings of Illich. Illich wrote, "it is my strong belief that one aspect of modernity was the loss of gratuity" (Cayley, 1992). This is not only a factual sentence disclosing what Illich believed. Above all, it discloses the personal stance Illich took to the world. To read Illich rightly requires being sensitive to the personal line of force that animates all his written work.

The practical Line

So far, I have suggested that being alert to two lines of forces — the theological and the personal — is indispensable to reading Illich well. However, no reading of Illich can be complete without attending to a third line of force that animates his public words. The practical line of force in Illich is as central as the other two lines of force.

8 It is interesting, as a philological exercise, to reflect on the use of the word δωρά (dora) on the gospels, from which δωρεάν (dorean) derives, for example – Pandora, literally the giver of everything, in the Greek world. It is interesting how in the Gospel according to Saint John δωρεάν (dorean) appears in a circumstance that explains the breadth of the sense of gift. In chapter 15, verse 25, Christ said: "… that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause". Note that the idea of a gift is linked to an experience without cause, no reason. At first, the lines seem to tell us about the fulfillment of a prophecy. However, could have Christ treated hatred as a gift, something that, in his process of becoming the son of God, allowed him to cultivate a more heated attitude towards life? The meaning of something without reason, which carries the etymology of the Greek word, also appears with a small change, δωρον (doron), in the gospel according to Matthew, for example, with a much more literal sense of a present. In Matthew 10, verse 8, in the words of Christ: "freely ye have received, freely give". In chapter 23, verse 19, Christ also said: "Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?". Here the offerings are the gift, a gift given for free (the word in German, Umsonst – literally out of nowhere – means gratuity). The scope of the gift, the present, this surprising gratuity is very clear in the Greek vernacular.

Illich has been called a militant intellectual for his deep and incisive critique of schooling, of healthcare, of work, city planning, and more besides. In each of these books, essays, pamphlets, and lectures, Illich attempted to invite the reader and the listeners to celebrate an awareness which can lead to practical, material, concrete changes, to instigate a feasible and concrete institutional revolution. But this is not the only sense in which Illich's writings are animated by a practicality. They are also shaped by his own lived experiences, sometimes a sustained encounter with a specific situation or person, and at other times by a chance phrase. For instance, Illich argues that a phrase from a feminist doctor "Mr. Illich, have you ever seen a human body" launched his most controversial book, Gender (1982). Similarly, the main ideas of the essays of Celebration of Awareness: a call for institutional revolution (1969) emerges from Illich's exposure to Puerto Ricans in New York and on the island, and from his time traveling through the deep South America where he found the real "vanishing clergymen."

One could say that this practical line of force is manifested in his role as a public intellectual. Without discarding this hypothesis, I suggest that Illich's practicality is better understood as that of a prophet, a point already made by Todd Hartch.[9] Yet, I both agree and disagree with Hartch. Illich's pamphlets and books on public issues such as schooling and reading were prophetic but not because, as argued by Hartch, they spoke of a future or because they spoke of the truth as he saw it. Instead, Illich is prophetic in the sense of revealing what lies overlooked on the surface of the present. The prophet sees what others cannot because they do not have eyes to see. In this sense, Illich is better described as a man of faith

9 Hartch, Todd. The Prophet of Cuernavaca. Ivan Illich and the crisis of the West. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.

rather than as a militant intellectual, a Christian anarchist, or social reformer. A man of faith does not imply a credulous believer, but rather a man who lived in the child-like simplicity of his faith. And faith, as Kierkegaard wisely put in the Works of Love, "invitingly volunteers to be man's companion on the way of life but petrifies the one who impudently turns around in order to try to understand it."

I have suggested that three intersecting lines of force frame all Illich's writings. That these lines of force constituting his writings can be seen even in the first essays he penned. To support this argument and for the purpose of this article, I analyze only one essay Illich wrote as a young man and later republished in his first book titled the Celebration of Awareness.

Here, in Puerto Rico, we…

In 1992, when asked by Cayley about where his home was, Illich named Puerto Rico. Illich confessed he had never been able to say, 'Here in the United States, or in Mexico, or in Göttingen, or in Marburg, or anywhere else, we.' Of the many places in which Illich lived he could only say, 'Here, people do this.' Even if Illich could not say, 'We Puerto Ricans,' it was the only place of which he could say, 'Here, in Puerto Rico, we wouldn't do that.'[10]

I will return to this sentence after I analyze the text to which this sentiment most pertains. Illich wrote a short article in 1959 entitled Puerto Ricans in New York: Not Foreigners, Yet Foreign. The title makes explicit that the issue Illich wants to discuss is the situation of American citizens who felt foreign in their 'own country.' Between 1951 and 1956, New York received about half a million Puerto Ricans in waves of immi-

10 Cayley, David. Ivan Illich in Conversation. Toronto: House of Anansi, 1992, p. 88.

gration that was considered to not yet have peaked. Foreigner refers to a legal status and implies a country of citizenship. In this sense, Puerto Ricans were not foreigners in New York. In fact, Puerto Ricans have been American citizens since 1917, the year that the United States Congress passed the Jones Act. Since then, Puerto Rico has been considered an associated state of the United States. It was not until 1947 that Puerto Ricans won the right to elect their own governor. Even today, Puerto Rico is not represented in the US Congress. Moreover, although they are American citizens, Puerto Ricans were perceived and treated as if they were immigrants, particularly by the Irish and Italians immigrants who preceded them. In this sense, the Puerto Ricans were foreign, which refers above all, to customs, habits, mores. Regardless of what their passport stated, Puerto Ricans were strange to New Yorkers and strangers in New York, whether in their modes of living, the rhythms of their language, their religious practices, or in their relation to the environment and each other. Illich's essay was devoted to both elucidate Puerto Rican ways to New Yorkers as well as to denounce the 'lack of consideration on the part of New York civic leaders.'

I have suggested that reading Illich coherently requires attending to three lines of force that animate his work. This short and early essay carries the signature of the interweaving of the theological, the personal, and the practical dimensions of an Illichian argument. The theological line of this essay is quite clear since it informs the core question Illich poses and the answer he offers: what do we do when a stranger knocks at our door? We celebrate! The personal line follows Illich's invitation for those who, like him, search for a form-of-life that is open to another's way of living while still being rooted in one's own history and culture. The practical line is also clear: by working with some people, Illich made New Yorkers less foreign to Puerto Ricans. The festival he conceived and

helped organize is celebrated today as the National Puerto Rican Day parade in New York city, and remains a monument to the practicality of Illich's ideas.

1. The personal line

On October 27, 1951, Illich boarded an old US Navy ship named USS General Harry Taylor in the port city of Bremerhaven, located north of Bremen, that was bound for the United States. The twenty-five-year-old Illich left Europe and docked in New York on November 6 of the same year. Illich came to the US with the intention of doing postdoctoral research at Princeton University on alchemy in the work of thirteenth century philosopher, Albert the Great.

However, on his very first day in New York City — literally on his first afternoon— while meeting with some of his grandfather's old friends, Illich heard about the 'issue' concerning Puerto Ricans in New York. His hosts who lived on 75 East St commented on the need to basically leave the city because of 'these people' who kept coming. This peculiar encounter generated in Illich a curiosity regarding the situation of 'these people.' As he recounted to Cayley, the very next day Illich walked to the barrio, far from the central attractions of New York, and, for two days straight, wandered up and down 122 street between 5th and Park Avenue. There he found the Puerto Rican markets, people assembling on the streets, and got a taste of their ways. After these two days, heeding an inexplicable call, Illich went to Cardinal Francis Spellman's[11] office and asked to be enlisted to any parish near the Puerto Rican community. Illich turned away from his offer at Princ-

11 Francis Spellman had been Archbishop of New York since 1939. During the Second World War, he was a Vatican mediator on the Council of Archbishops for Military Service in Washington DC. He also shared the anti-communist spirit that characterized the 1940s/50s of the official church in the United States. The cardinal participated in the political group of Irish Catholic immigrants who, in the 1960s, with the Kennedy family, elected the first Catholic president in the history of the United States.

eton on that day, abandoning the original reason for coming to the United States in the first place, and took over the Incarnación Parish, located in the northern tip of Manhattan, in a neighborhood called Washington Heights.[12] It is interesting how this kind of abrupt change in Ivan Illich's trajectory is constantly repeated. As he once said, he never knew how to explain what led him to make the most important decisions of his life. And this was certainly one of them.

Yet, the sudden turn towards 'these people' cannot be understood without noting the interweaving of personal decision and theological principles. In Illich's understanding of the Good Samaritan, something, or I should say, someone moves one's entrails towards the other, and in so doing reveals who is one's neighbor. It is impossible to institutionalize this visceral and personal movement. Responding to it consists in practicing a way of living that is open to the surprise of the other's face. Religious obligations blunt and even suppress the impetus of the invitation towards another which comes from the bowels. Illich understanding of ethics is based on a personal vocation rather than obedience to laws, it is formed of forging relationships that come from responding to a call rather than behaving in accordance with a categorical imper-

12 Taken by the desire to feel a little of the experience of walking to the barrio, I decided to walk from the Grand Central Terminal, in Manhattan, from 42nd Street to Incarnación Parish, in Washington Heights, 175th Street. It was in the winter of 2015, January. It was -8ºC. After two and a half hours of walking the twelve kilometers of asphalt, I arrived at the parish. The route is curious. What begins as a city of skyscrapers, exuberant expressions of triumphant riches and cosmopolitan air, becomes a suburban landscape starting from 122nd Street, with smaller and simpler buildings. However, after passing through Columbia University Hospital, Broadway Avenue intersects with St. Nicholas Avenue, at 169th Street; the change is remarkable. The atmosphere is different. I felt like in a Latin American country. Only Spanish was heard in the streets. Despite the cold that cut my skin, the streets seemed to convey a warmth, a different welcome, regardless of a more shabby appearance. When entering a store in search for a hot coffee, the clerk did not even consider directing me the word in English. We did all the counter conversation in Spanish, as if we had been in the Dominican Republic, the country of origin of most of the residents who currently live in the region.

ative.

2. The theological Line

Illich's decision to turn away from the intended doctoral work at Princeton and to become a priest at Encarnación parish was a response to the call he heard. But his personal decision is not comprehensible outside his faith. One key that opens several arguments of Illich's methodology can be found on his exegesis of the parable of the Good Samaritan, The Gospel according to St. Luke.[13] The parable is simple and straightforward. It was told as an answer to the question of a scribe, therefore a master on the law of the Torah, who asked Christ about who the neighbor was in one of the most important commandments of the law, love thy neighbor as thyself. After being assaulted by thieves, a Jewish man is left for dead in the vicinity of a road that connects two cities. Two men of the same ethnicity as the half-dead man, both with important positions among their own – a priest and a Levite – and a third man of another ethnicity – a Samaritan, cross paths with this dying man. The first two pass on, whereas the third one reached out to help him.

Why did Christ choose a priest as an example of the men who passed by the dying man? The shallow answer is that Christ had used the figure of the priest to condemn the religious hypocrisy of his day. A priest of the Jewish people was elected by God through rigorous scrutiny. In addition to the privilege of entering the place of the Saints, first in the tabernacle and then in the Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem,

13 The reader of Illich was introduced to his exegesis of the parable of the Good Samaritan only after the conversations with David Cayley, later compiled in the form of the book The Rivers North of the Future. The Testament of Ivan Illich as told to David Cayley (2005). In chapters 1 and 2 (Gospel and Mystery respectively) the reader will find Illich's central thesis on the corruption of Christ – perversio optimi quae est pessima – and its implications regarding the institutionalization of faith, that is the rise of Samaritan corporations.

the priest presents the burnt offerings to God, the bread of his God and must therefore be in a state of holiness (Leviticus 21, 6). He examines his people, deals with disputes, adjudicates on sensitive matters, and represents his nation through offerings to God. That is, the priest is a position of extreme importance, charged with authority and mediates the relationship between God and the people to which he belongs.

The Torah also legislates how this priest must behave to be fit for service. In Leviticus 21:1, "And the Lord said unto Moses, 'Speak unto the priests the sons of Aaron, and say unto them, There shall none be defiled by the dead among his people: But for his kin, that is near unto him, that is, for his mother, and for his father, and for his son, and for his daughter, and for his brother, And for his sister a virgin.'" In the parable told by Christ, the man who fell into the hands of robbers is said to be half-dead. In other words, the Law that underlies the behavior of the priest, the mental space that shapes the life of this priest, forbids him from touching a dead body. There is nothing more prudent, in this sense, than to leave this apparently dead body at the risk of becoming unclean. After all, it is to preserve his holiness that this man refuses to touch the dead body of a stranger. The priest follows the dictates of good conscience to fulfill his role before the people of God; to maintain meticulous compliance with the Law, which would undoubtedly have been bred into his very bones and sinews by years of devoted practice.

And what about the Levite? Does he have an explanation as scrupulous as that of the priest for crossing to the other side of the road when he sees the dying man? Yes. He handles all the utensils that belong to the Temple. None but the Levite can handle the utensils which are used and touched by the priest during the many rituals and offerings to God. In other words, the law that applies to the priest extends to the Levite, mainly due to his direct interaction with everything

that the priest touches. He is in the service of the Temple and belongs to God, set apart to serve and assist the priest (Numbers 3: 5, 10). The same prudence pricks the mind of the Levite, who, given the possibility of becoming impure, passes by the half-dead man.

Thus, although the two men are of the same ethnicity as the man left for dead, we see that the moral structure that governs the culture and the system of relationships of these two clergymen justifies their apparent disregard of human suffering. Although countless commentaries of the Christian bible take that tack, I do not see in this story any hypocrisy on the part of the priest and the Levite. On the contrary, all they can be blamed for is a precise and scrupulous reading of the Law. It is because they do not want to be unclean before God and his people that they do not touch the half-dead man (possible corpse).

Finally, what does it mean to be a Samaritan? Who is this third guy? Do we find in him the "ideal type" of love thy neighbor? The Samaritan is a type who, being a former Jewish settler of Samaria, fell away from the precepts of God and, even worse, also worshiped foreign gods (2 Kings 17: 24,41). For generations, those who settled in Samaria – called Samaritans – were considered by faithful Jews to be semi-idolaters. The Chosen People should not even want to speak to people of the "apostate race" (Barrett, 1978).

In St. Luke's narrative, the journeying Samaritan approached the dying man's feet and when he saw him, he was moved by his guts towards that man (in Greek 'splankhnízomai' – most, if not all modern translations choose the concept of compassion or pity for such word, although literally it unequivocally refers to a visceral movement; viscera = splankhna).[14] To be viscerally touched is a movement within

14 According to Frederico Lourenço, the verb 'splankhnízomai' is used eleven times in each of the three synoptic Gospels (St. Mathew, St. Mark and St. Luke, totaling 33 cases).

the being, which can and must result, if answered, in actions of love. The source of this movement that stirs the viscera is a mystery on which I dare not spend words. Yet, the image of feeling visceral pain is neither a philological whim of Saint Luke nor a textual ornament. It points to the source from which Christian love is born. In keeping with the parable of Christ, Illich lived the impossibility of categorizing 'who is my neighbor.' A neighbor can be anyone who is viscerally felt and one can or can not answer that call.

It is in the third paragraph of his essay that Illich discreetly discloses this theological well from which he draws his argument. Illich distances himself from the typical take on foreigners. Either they are designated as strangers and consistently treated as outsiders or, in a misunderstanding of St. Paul's instruction "to make himself Jew with the Jews and Greek with the Greeks," indifferently included under the 'we are all Americans' banner. The first approach precludes any possibility to cherish and correspond with unique and unknown ways of living. The second, on the other hand, denies the heritage, the sap of tradition which has fed peoples from the roots of history. The first stance has no windows or doors that enlarge the boundaries that encircle a community whereas the second is a universal approach that colonizes the imaginary space of persons and their heritage.

In the case of Puerto Ricans in New York, the first approach to foreigners was predominant. What scandalized Illich was the stereotypical way in which New Yorkers and, especially the church,[15] approached Puerto Ricans. He was

It refers always or directly to Jesus (Matthew 9:35, 14:14, 15:32, 20:34; Mark 1:41, 6:34, 8: 2; Luke 7:13) or to characters in the parables of Jesus, who are like alter egos of Christ (the king who forgives the slave's astronomical debt in Matthew 18:27; the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:33; or the father of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:20, who is viscerally moved when he sees the state in which the son returns to home.

15 It is important to make a clarification regarding the use of the words church or Church (capital C) throughout the text. When I use church, I mean the institution, the "it",

disturbed by the lack of sensitivity and perception of the locals to the newcomers who were unlike the Italians and Irish. A conflict was already simmering in the barrio between the Irish and the Puerto Ricans. A different manner and set of policies were needed to meet the Puerto Ricans where they were. Illich reported that he was impressed by the fact that he could find in Cardinal Spellman an attentive listener to his suggestions of how the church should position itself with respect to the situation in the barrio.

To better explore the theological warrants for some of the practices and mores of the Puerto Rican faithful, Spellman suggested a meeting between Illich and Joseph Fitzpatrick, the priest and professor of sociology at Fordham University – where the cardinal himself had studied. In fact, the two became great friends and companions in the campaign for a New York more receptive to Puerto Ricans. Fitzpatrick had authored Puerto Rican Americans: The Meaning of Migration to the Mainland (1968) and was familiar with the issue when Illich met him. By the time Illich took over the barrio parish in 1952, a third of the baptized Catholics in Manhattan and the Lower Bronx were Latin Americans. Until that time, Puerto Ricans were the first large group of non-European Catholic immigrants with religious traditions very different from the orthodoxy in these neighborhoods. The number of

which embraces the bureaucracy, the administration, and the apparatus of the Catholic tradition. When I use Church, I mean the Mystical Body of Christ, the "She", not always visible nor necessarily under the wings of the church. By making such distinction I am not saying that the Catholic church is not within the Mystical Body of Christ, to which I call Church, where Christ is the head (see St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians, his first and second letter to the Corinthians and his letter to the Colossians). I rather use Church to embrace communities and forms-of-life not necessarily under the approval or recognition of the church to avoid narrowing the Mystical Body to one institution. If the analyzes of this essay was one concerning the Lutheran church, or the Baptist church or the churches of Christ I would follow the same method of differentiation between the church "it" and the Church "She". The distinction, not the way I apply it, between the church "it" and the Church "She" can also be seen in Ivan Illich, The Powerless Church, ibid.

Latin priests was meager, not only in in Manhattan but also in Puerto Rico. In fact, such was the difficulty of access to certain Puerto Rican villages, that a priest's visit was sporadic, if not exclusively for a sacrament. Many on the island baptized their own children without the presence of a priest. The chapel, in addition to receiving some masses, never every Sunday, was a communal meeting and celebration space for the patron saint San Juan, named after the country's capital. Given this history of the Puerto Ricans, attending Sunday Mass did not reaffirm, for them, any fundamental practice of the Catholic faith.

The idiosyncrasy of Puerto Rican Catholicism caught the attention of Ivan Illich. He realized, with keen sensitivity, that Europe and the United States did not know this more organic and less institutionalized faith. Moreover, the judgements formed about 'these people' even from within the church were based on denigrating the less institutionalized faithful as somehow less pious. Perhaps it was this contact with day-to-day lived faith that prompted Illich to find theological support for it in canon law. In any case, Illich cites church Law that recognizes a marriage between Catholics even when not performed in front of a priest.[16] The Puerto Rican practice of electing a layperson to carry out the sacrament of marriage was thus legitimized if a priest could not visit a distant village for a month. This contact is also what probably motivated Illich to travel from village to village in the secluded mountains of Puerto Rico. As Fitzpatrick reported, "once Illich arrived at Incarnation Parish and realized that many newly arrived Puerto Ricans had moved into the area, he went to Puerto Rico, learned Spanish almost overnight, and spent one month on foot exploring many aspects

16 The reference is to the Code of Canon Law prior to the Second Vatican Council and to the Apostolic Constitution Sacrae Disciplinae Leges of John Paul II. In other words, the Pentecost of 1917, which had undergone its first reform of the Corpus in 1959, by John XXIII.

of Puerto Rican life."[17]

3. The practical Line

For five years, from 1951 to 1956, Illich lived in the parish of Washington Heights working directly with the Puerto Rican community as a priest, but above all as a community leader. In my conversation with Mother Abbess David at the Monastery of Regina Laudis in Connecticut, Illich's status as a community leader became clear. M. Abbess David was the daughter of immigrants, of Peruvian mother and English father, and lived in the barrio. She was experiencing a crisis of faith due to her sociology course and went to the closest parish to seek advice from the priest. That's how they met in 1952. Illich encouraged her to get involved with founding the El Cuartito de María (The Little House of Mary), an apartment to house a small library, ludic games, and some tables and chairs, where women from the barrio could mind their children. They could come and go freely, to study, to have fun or simply to rest. As Joseph Fitzpatrick noted, "this was exactly the kind of casual, personal relationship that would have been characteristic of a barrio in Puerto Rico."

Priests, social workers, and teachers of all kinds were immersed in a multitude of Spanish speakers. In the words of Ivan Illich: "they needed to learn to speak Spanish, more than anything, they needed to tune in their ears and open their hearts to the anxieties of people who were alone, frightened and helpless." In 1956, Illich's engagement culminated with the legendary celebration in honor to the patron saint

17 A hypothesis worth exploring at greater depth is whether and to what extent, Illich's arguments in the Vanishing Clergyman (1959/1967) was shaped by and formulated in the wake of his experience with the Puerto Ricans. Specifically, the encounter with it in New York is Illich's first direct contact with a living faith in which the priest was not necessary for the priestly functions. This manner of a relatively un-institutionalized and living faith was further affirmed during his later pilgrimages through South America.

of Puerto Ricans, San Juan. This first patronal celebration of the Catholic Church brought together more than thirty-five thousand people. Kaller-Dietrich says that Illich had given several coins to some thirty young Puerto Ricans to search the city's telephone directory for Latin names and surnames and to invite them for the party.[18] In the words of Fitzpatrick, "looking back on this, I recognize [Illich's] clear conviction of the need to enable the people to use their own resources in order to cope with their problems rather than constructing agencies and institutions to care for them."

The Fordham University courtyard, which hosted the festivities, had been taken over by a celebratory spirit. As the community spontaneously organized itself, food, dance, music, and merriment completed the fundamental triad of the religious experience: liturgy, ritual, and celebration. After twelve consecutive years of celebrating this feast since 1956, driven by Ivan Illich, the celebration of the patron, St. John, was made official. This celebration, over the past twenty years, has been transformed into the Puerto Rican Day Parade, in which more than six hundred thousand people participated in 2016. Today, it is considered one of the largest cultural festivals in the United States. Far more significant than a contemporary popular cultural attraction is the root of this celebration in Illich's efforts to midwife a Church in the barrio of Washington Heights.

Accordingly, the theological (response to who is the neighbor), the personal (reorientation from Princeton to the Barrio), and the practical (helping Puerto Ricans make something of a "home" in NYC) are all woven into this short essay.

18 Kaller-Dietrich, Martina. Vita di Ivan Illich: Il pensatore del Novecento più necessario e attuale. Roma: Edizioni Dell Asino, 2011.

Conclusion

I have suggested that to read Illich well, one must be alert to three lines of force or dimensions of his writings that animate them. The theological, personal, and practical lines of force are interwoven in his essays and express what I call Illich's necessity to write. Though I limited my analyses to one short essay that exposes a concordance between life and thought, I am almost convinced that one could see the same pattern throughout Illich's written pages. Puerto Ricans in New York not only combines Illich's intellectual scholarship with his immersion into the depths of a communal life not of his own. The essay also exposes the three lines of force that generate, arguably, all his written texts. The interweaving of the theological, the personal, and the practical dimensions of his essays express the integrity of thought and life in Illich. I also suggested that the interconnectedness of these three lines of force can often be gauged by a sentence or sentiment Illich pronounces. Earlier in this article I promised to revisit Illich's assertion that nowhere except in Puerto Rico could he say, 'here in Puerto Rico, we…' thought importantly, even in Puerto Rico, he could not say, "We Puerto Ricans.'

This statement from 1992 can now be read as a clarifying the essay published in 1959. Though he plunged headfirst into the predicament of the Puerto Ricans in New York inexplicably moved by a call that he heard, Illich maintained a distance to the world to which he is nevertheless attached. He acknowledged feeling a kinship to Puerto Rico ('…in Puerto Rico, we..') but did not dissolve the distance between him and Puerto Ricans ('I could not say "we Puerto Ricans"'). The theological depth of his personal response to a call can be gauged by the fidelity of his stance to be in the world and not of it. In this sense, Illich is himself the knot of the essay he wrote, the man who renounced prestige to answer the call of his gut, to embrace the 'beaten' stranger, and to celebrate the

gratuity of their friendship.

This is how I read Ivan Illich. I do not claim this reading of how to read Illich to be the definitive version. Instead, what truth it possesses derives from its correspondence to where I stand, to the way I live. My hope is that this article can motivate few other stories. And hope does not disappoint.

IVAN: "IN BOOK AFTER BOOK..." (AS PROMISED)*

by Bill Arney

On the outskirts of Havana, they call friends mi tiera, my country, or mi sangre, my blood. In Caracas, a friend is mi pana, my bread, or mi llave, my key: pana from panadería, bakery, the source of wholesome bread to sate the hunger of the soul; llave from... "Key, from key," Mario Benedetti tells me.
And he tells me how, when he lived in Buenos Aires in times of terror, he would carry five alternate keys on this key ring: the keys to five houses, to five friends: the keys that proved his salvation.

Eduardo Galeano
The Book of Embraces

There is a sense in which I have known the work of Ivan Illich for more than fifteen years. There is another sense in which I have known his work only since beginning to know him, something that happened only two years ago. My topic is the work of Ivan Illich as I know it.

Bob Kugelmann says that the making of lists is a peculiarly modern phenomenon. You know the kind of list he has in mind. Item #1: "Make a List." Item #2: "Grocery Shopping (See attached List)" Item #3: "Study (See reading list)." Bob has written about these lists in his book on the history of stress.[1] Stress is a modern phenomenon, too coming out of the "strain" of the 19th century and out of "grief" and "loss" before that. In times of stress, make a list. Prioritize and get

* A lecture at The Evergreen State College, January, 1992. This piece was prepared for inclusion in a Uniqat, a book published in an edition of one and presented to Ivan Illich on the occasion of his 65th birthday. The title refers to an exchange we had after Illich began a foreword to one of my books with "In book after book...." When I read that I told Illich that someday I would feel prepared to say what I had learned from him "in book after book."

1 Kugelmann, Robert, Stress: The Nature and History of Engineered Grief, New York: Praeger, 1992.

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Arney, B. IVAN: "In book after book..."
(as promised). Conspiratio, Fall 2021, p.113-125.

started, the therapists tell us. Just make a list and check things off as you go. By your check-marks of accomplishment will you be known.

There is another kind of list. A friend in New Hampshire has a daughter who, just as she was learning to talk, would wake up each morning and recite the list of all the words she knew. "Mama, No, Dog, Eat, It, Me...." The list grew longer as she grew older. Every morning, she would read all the words from memory. Eventually, I imagine, she developed a sense of security about the fact that this list of words by which she was known and by which she made herself known in the world would not be lost to her because of a night's sleep. She eventually stopped rehearsing her list every morning. But I dare say she keeps that list, which grows longer still, with her even now.

Illich concludes his lecture, "The Educational Enterprise in the Light of the Gospel," his call for paying attention to dropouts, with a plea for the construction of lists.

> None of [the educational research money in the U.S.] is focused on the transformation of the status of the dropout from that of an escapee who must be caught and brought back into the fold into that of a world wise, reasonable person. I do not plead for some new form of institutionalized haven. Rather I think of niches, free spaces, squatters arrangements, spiritual tents which some of us might be able to offer, not for "the dropout in general" but each of us for a small "list" of others, who through the experience of mutual obedience have become able to renounce integration into the "system."[2]

2 Illich, Ivan, "The Educational Enterprise in Light of the Gospel," Lecture Notes, Chicago, Ill., November 13, 1988, pp. 30-31.

This small "list" of others is not the to-do list of the stressed-out person suffering her losses under a regime of what Kugelmann calls "engineered grief" and who is trying desperately, with a little organization and a little perseverance, just to keep less far behind than yesterday. This is not the list of the roll call with its implied or explicit list of "individual needs" to which the teacher can respond through the mobilization of resources. Illich's small list of others is more like Jennifer's morning recital of her words. It is a list of other people through which, via the intimacy of "mutual obedience," one is known and makes oneself known in the world.

The creation of this kind of list has one possible (but certainly not necessary) outcome: enabling oneself and others "to renounce integration into the 'system.'" For many years Illich and a list of associates have undertaken what they call "an archeology of modern certainties." This involves a particular kind of historical inquiry into those terms that we all take for granted, terms and practices that we think give orientation to life and living. For example, Barbara Duden's has inquired into the appearance of that modern thing—the "fetus"—in the place previously occupied by the *nondum*, the "not yet" in a "woman's innards."[3] Illich has been interested in the appearance of the notion of "life." He, like Foucault, has studied the appearance of "sex" on the recent historical scene. Other associates have undertaken studies of "progress," "helping," "development," and so on.[4] Illich has either discovered or invented (the distinction is not, I think, of great importance here) something called "gender" and "gendered society" to demonstrate that this modern given, sex (a variable characteristic of a similarly recent thing, the "human being") is

3 Duden, Barbara, Disembodying Women: Perspectives on Pregnancy and the Unborn, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993.

4 Sachs, Wolfgang, ed., The Development Dictionary, London: Zed Books, 1992

historically and culturally contingent. The list of the modern certainties with which Illich has concerned himself is much longer. What I am concerned with today is not the items on that list but rather Illich's attitude toward them. We must, he says, say a firm and resolute "no" to these modern certainties in order to avoid integration into the "system."

At first glance there seems a parallel between Illich and Foucault on this matter of saying "no." (There is not a parallel between either of these guys and Nancy Reagan's "just say no.") Foucault, in his "Preface to Transgression,"[5] says something like, "Use
the positive voice to say 'no.'" Boundaries must be breached and limits transgressed to affirm something like the limitlessness of life together, he seems to say. Illich's "no" is not the same sort of "no." It is a complementary form of "no." The comparison is worth attention.

Foucault's histories are of the social, one might even say artificial, placement of boundaries in social life. His first studies were of the boundaries between the mad and the sane and the diseased and the well. Later he became interested in the normal and in the processes of normalization in which boundaries are seemingly fluid and have the capacity to capture everything under a regime of "discipline." But still there was the implied boundary of the "system," the boundary of the prison wall, the boundary of the social within which everyone was a delinquent, "at risk" and all those other terms that the Normal inflicts on us. These are the boundaries that must, he says, be transgressed (in the name of nothing).

Illich is interested in the ways in which things—social institutions in particular, tools in general— grow in utility

5 Foucault, Michel, "A preface to transgression," pp. 29-52 in Donald F. Bouchard, ed., Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977

beyond their own limits. In medicine he would be interested in the way limited knowledge of the uses of a few plants or a few techniques by a few people has grown into the modern world's principal industry and has claimed, in the name of health and wellness, authority for the management of living. In education, he has been interested in the way the experience of an orientation he calls "bookishness" has grown into the business of compulsory, age graded, universal ... and so on, stuff we call "schooling." For Illich, the threat to good living comes not from teaching and learning per se or from efforts to help people in times of illness per se; the threat comes from the expansiveness of the institutionalized forms of these activities, from the way that there is seemingly no way to live unless one submits to the "system" or becomes a good and faithful critic of the "system."

So Illich says "no." No, I do not want to accept the generous offers of systematized help. And equally forcefully, no, I do not want to debate how to make systematized help better, regardless of what criterion happens to be the reigning measure of "better" at the time. By saying "no" in this doubled form one does not transcend limits; instead, one is able "to renounce integration into the 'system,'" the system that is based on the grounding concept of "needs."

Most of Illich's analyses proceed from a concern with the assertion and imputation of "human needs." Most institutions come into being through their ability to assert that people have needs: the need for health, the need for certified knowledge, etc. It just so happens—historically it happens—that the institutions that name your needs are the institutions that say they are able to meet those needs. But, historically and empirically, institutions have a "specific (or paradoxical) counterproductivity" that leads them to effect the opposite of what they claim they will do. Medicine causes not ease from illness but dis-ease. (He said medicine is "iatrogenic.") School-

ing causes a peculiar kind of illiteracy. This sets up the sort of social dynamic that Foucault outlined with prisons, viz., institutions bring with them their own impulse for (and, indeed, their own rhetoric of) reform. What Illich and Foucault both recognize is that the proponents and the reformer-opponents of social institutions both accept the underlying premise that there is a human need that must be met. The only question—the thing that separates proponent and opponent—is how to meet those needs. So Illich's "no" is directed more against the foundational notion of "need" than it is against the institutions that presume to meet those needs.

Of course, in these times, this can be a silly kind of posture to adopt. A gentle critic might ask, "Are you saying, Professor Illich, that the human body does not have a need for a certain number of calories to keep going?" or, "Don't you think that children need some knowledge?" Instead of saying what his understandings might lead him to say (viz., "I would prefer not to think thoughtlessly about a person having a 'human body' that can be conceived as an energetic device," or "I don't think it's good that we have turned a certain portion of our number into 'children.'"), he just says "no" to such invitational questions. He renounces the questions themselves and thereby renounces integration into the system.

Marianne Gronemeyer has written a book called *The Power of Needs*.[6] In it she writes about the power institutions come to have in our lives if we accept the premise that humans are need-full beings. She finds an opposition to this power not in power of another sort: the power of reason, the power of historical contradictions, the power of well-assembled critical groups, etc., pick one depending on your theory of social change. She finds opposition to this form of power in *Ohn-*

6 Gronemeyer, Marianne, Die Macht der Berdürfnesse: Reflexion über ein Phantom rowohat, Verlag Reinbeck, 1988.

macht, a German word that has two meanings: powerlessness and fainting. To oppose the power of needs one must accept one's total powerlessness. One must faint away[7] in the face of the reasonable demand that one enter into the dominant discourse, either as an advocate or as a member of the loyal opposition.

Illich's "no" is, for me, not a protest against or even a critical attack on modern institutions in the usual sense. His "no" is more a protest against the presumed adequacy of human knowledge. His attack is on the *presumptuousness* of knowledge and understanding, and, drawing on what I said before about limits, on the seeming limitlessness of our presumptuousness. He is opposed to the presumed elimination, through the operations of reason, of mystery from life. Not, I am quick to add, the "mystery" of which Joseph Campbell speaks, which is an excuse for not pursuing knowledge of anything, but the mystery one encounters at the end of a life of loving struggle to know something. This is part of the reason, I think, Illich has started writing not as a theologian, as he cautiously insists, but in a more explicitly theologically in-

7 Lenny Bruce: "I'm doing a new bit that you'll just flip out with. It's social commentary. I do it with a colored guitarist, Eric Miller. The bit is on integration.
"So anyway, we do the bit together. Halfway through the bit—there is this party of four to my right, and they're really bugging me, you know, saying, 'I don't unnerstan it.'
"So I give this woman a quick stab: 'You schlub, you wouldn't understand anything'—you know.
"The other guy says, 'What'd he say to her?'
"The other guy says, 'He said something dirty in Jewish.'
"So I said, 'There is nothing dirty in Jewish.'
"So dig, she takes this old-fashioned glass, and starts winging it, man vvvooom! Right past me, man. I'm shocked. It crashes behind me.
"So I say, 'You've got a bad sense of humor, and bad aim.'
"So she gets bugged again, throws a second glass.
"I said, 'Well, assuming I'm the most vulgar, irreverent comedian you've ever seen, you've capped it with violence. You realize what a terrible thing—you threw a glass at me!'
"So dig what the husband says: 'What else would a lady have done?'
"I said, 'Faint!'"
(From Cohen, John, ed., The Essential Lenny Bruce, New York, N.Y.: Random House, 1967, pp. 116-117.)

formed language. In his call for a new askesis in *higher education*, I hear Illich opposing not the search for knowledge and the love of wisdom, but I hear him opposing the posturing that results from the assumption that the proper way to know and be known in the world is to involve oneself in the plays of power that develop around knowledge. I hear in this a call to accept the posturelessness of one who has fainted away in embracing one's powerlessness.

Illich's inquiry into our modern condition, an inquiry marked by his insistent "no," is entirely negative. Erich Fromm called his approach "radical doubt." Illich's criticisms are pointed and harsh if also rigorously empirical. But they are not intended to be productive. They do not point toward a better future In Gender, what he calls his first "book," Illich shows why it is important for him not to be interested in even the causes of our current situation. He writes,

> In this essay I have not tried to explain why society places the man on top and the handicap on the woman. *I have controlled my curiosity* [gloss: he has resisted the temptation to the possible limitlessness of this inquiry] in order to be free to listen more attentively to the report of the losers, to learn not about them but about the battlefield that is the economy.[8]

You must say "no" even to the general mode of inquiry that seeks causes for each obvious effect so that you do not develop a prurient interest in the situation of others whom you cannot know. You have to say "no" to the all-too-easy business of turning the subjects of history into objects of inquiry. Why? So that you stand a slight chance of developing an understanding of things as they have come to be.

8 Illich, Ivan, Gender, New York, N.Y.: Pantheon, 1982, p. 178, emphasis added.

After that, after renouncing an interest in the dominant mode of inquiry, you also have to renounce the kind of interest in the future that is a commonplace of what passes for politics today but which is a kind of an interest in the future that is allowed to only a privileged few. *Gender* begins to end with this,

> I have no strategy to offer. I refuse to speculate on the probabilities of any cure. I shall not allow the shadow of the future to fall on the concepts with which I try to grasp what is and what has been.[9]

Illich's work is a thorough-going critique of the modern condition. And somewhat like Foucault, he refuses to go farther than the present. He refuses to suggest some presumed grand plan which might attract disciples and foundation grants and which might lead to the formation of utopian communities composed of nothing but the blind.

Indeed, the only interest I can find in Illich's work is an interest in having eyes open. He writes in the introduction to the lecture on education, "I will argue that—in this instance—the Gospel sharpens our eyes for the perception of the obvious, which our schooled minds cannot admit."[10] His work is a kind of invitation to look and see, a "celebration of awareness." [11] His readers are invited to see not through his eyes and certainly not through the theory-bound eyes of the well-schooled, but through their own eyes, using whatever devices help sharpen their own visions of things as they are. We are back to a Lenny Bruce-like notion that people ought

9 Ibid., p. 179.

10 Illich, "The Educational Enterprise," op. cit., p. 1.

11 Illich, Ivan, Celebration of Awareness, Berkeley, Calif.: Heyday Books, 1969.

to be taught what is, not what should be. And to show what a thing is in these well-schooled times, when everyone knows what everything is truly *and* has an opinion about it, you have to proceed negatively.

Sometimes when the nature of a thing is so obvious and yet there are so many competing well-schooled visions of what a thing could be if it were better fitted for life, you have to proceed by showing people what a thing is not. So, schooling is *not* about transmission of knowledge. Medicine is *not* about healing the sick. Because he is interested not in reform but in making a way for people to seize a good life lived well together, Illich tries to dismantle the visions that support social institutions that erode and undermine the possibility of living well.

Illich proceeds down his negative way with only one thing that some might consider positive. He has hope. *Gender* ends, "I strongly suspect that a contemporary art of living *can* be recovered…The hope for such a life rests upon the rejection of sentimentality and on openness to surprise."[12] Josef Pieper says hope, in the tradition from which Illich writes,

> is the condition of man's existence as a knowing subject, a condition that by its very nature cannot be fixed: it is neither comprehension and possession nor simply non-possession, but "not-yet-possession." [This construction recalls Duden's nondum, her "not-yet."] The knowing subject is visualized as a traveller, a viator, as someone "on the way." This means, from one point of view, that the steps he takes have significance, that they are not altogether in vain, and that they bring him nearer his goal. Yet this thought has to be complemented by another: as long as man as "existing being" is "on the way," just so

12 Illich, Gender, op. cit., p. 179.

> long is the "way" of his knowing uncompleted.[13]

Through his constant critiques, Illich offers no vision, no ideas for renewal, no scheme for reform. He offers only the hope of the not-yet.

With what are we left in this condition of the not-yet, in this condition of hope? We are left with our lists. One might be a person left with the list of the sort Kugelmann writes about. In the face of the not-yet, there are things to do. Just list them and get them done. The not-yet may remain, still, the not-yet, but at least you will have a sense of accomplishment. One might, alternatively, be a person with the sort of list Illich writes about, a small list of others with whom you live in relationships of mutual obedience. It is worth reminding ourselves what Illich means by "obedience":

> unobstructed listening, unconditional readiness to hear, untrammeled disposition to be surprised by the Other's word… When I listen unconditionally, respectfully, courageously with the readiness to take in the other as a radical surprise…I bow, bend over towards the total otherness of someone. But I renounce the searching for bridges between the other and me, recognizing that a gulf separates us. Leaning into this chasm makes me aware of the depth of my loneliness and able to bear it in light of the substantial likeness between the other and myself. All that reaches me is the other in his word, which I accept on faith.[14]

13 Pieper, Josef, The Silence of St. Thomas: Three Essays, New York, N.Y.: Pantheon, 1957, pp. 69-70.

14 Illich, "The Educational Enterprise," op. cit., pp. 18-19.

I once learned that Illich's notion of a list has a material manifestation in his life. He has a list of several hundred names he carries with him all the time. When he writes something, he sends it to some of the people on this list. They listen. When someone on the list calls on him or writes, he listens in order to give a conscientious response. It is through this list of people he knows—and not through, for example, his list of books—that Illich knows himself and is known.

Now I will make what may seem a rather sudden turn. I want to turn away from the nature of the lists by which one is known and ask, finally, what it is that is obvious once our eyes are sharpened and opened and able to see? To do this, I must turn toward one interpretation of the work of a man Allan Nasser calls one of the three greatest philosophers in history. I look to the work and the life of Thomas Aquinas, acknowledging that Illich works in this tradition of a Christian appropriation of Aristotelian thinking. A colleague says that, out of the boredom of her schooling, she was moved to read all of Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*. This is something that no one can do, of course, because Thomas's *Summa* is incomplete. Several months before he died, Thomas suddenly stopped writing his great work. He told his assistant, "Reginald, I can write no more. All that I have written before seems to me nothing but straw." Thomas spent the last months of his life almost totally in silence. He broke this silence once, to speak to an order on "The Song of Songs," that book of the Bible that recounts the sensuousness of embodied love. It was a fitting last talk for a man who knew it was impossible to separate the love of truth from the love of other human beings.[15]

When I look into Illich's writings to find the "obvious" for which the perception of our eyes is to be sharpened, it seems, at first, obvious that we no longer live with Aquinas' conviction. It seems obvious, today, that a lover of truth need

15 After Pieper, op. cit.

not make any declarations about his relationship to any other human being. It seems obvious that the love of one's fellows is something conducted on a different plane from the love of truth. But then it appears equally "obvious" that right there, in Ivan's work, in book after book, there is an invitation to make the connection again and again, all the time, everywhere. The loving search for the truth is inseparable from the search for loving friends. Illich writes his critiques of our modern condition, yes, but he also has his list, his list that embodies and enfleshes his hope. The two are obviously connected. But Illich never makes the connection. He never writes about it; he never speaks about it. But if something is obvious, I suppose you don't have to say anything. We know that at least one of the great philosophers fell silent when everything became obvious to him.

THE STRANGENESS OF THE OBVIOUS

by Jean Robert

Sometimes, the familiar scenery of highways, concrete, city skies which forms the immediately-perceived landscape of the urban condition gives me frightening intimations. I could say that it speaks to me of homelessness, but this would imply a need for something that I do not lack, since I generally have a place where I can sleep in a bed and money in my pocket to pay for it. What happens, rather, is that this very ordinary panorama suddenly appears otherworldly to me — martian, perhaps, but I am a Martian; I see a world of alien creatures and I am one of them. Looking at the world through an automobile windshield among evasive signs of evasion to elsewhere, I am nowhere and I feel I am from nowhere. The asphalt though is black-gray, steel structures are covered with tinted glass, lines of cars assemble on both sides: all is as it ought to be, everything is simply normal, terribly normal.

Although I enjoy the privilege of not owing a private car, commuting is for me a given, part of my human condition, as are the traffic landscapes through which others also wend their way. Nothing wrong with me nor with the shape of familiar things, nevertheless - the unspeakable dizziness. An explanation would not help. I could tell you that I live in a noisy neighborhood in one city, have a job in another, that the morning bus, often has no empty seat and so I travel standing. I could add details about this frequent ordeal, how I manage to live with, why I continue to refuse to own a car. But all explanations would only show how ordinary, how normal my condition is. I would just dissipate the dizziness, turning

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Conspiratio, Fall 2021, p.126-135.

it into banality or make myself look like a guy with a penchant for telling a story.

Sometimes I do not believe what my eyes tell me, do not like the taste of what I smell, nor the feel of the "stuffs" my eye touches. I am angry with what my feet see and what I hear tastes bitter. Today's words tell me that one sees with the eyes, that the ear is the organ for hearing, that I had better hold the steering wheel of my life firmly in my hands. I am offered words to mend the cracks left by disruptive feelings.

Then once in a library, I found a catalogue of an exhibition of painter, Sydney Goodman. As I glanced at his 'hyperrealistic' pictures of traffic landscapes and windshield sights of highways shooting through suburb and country, I recognized scenes all too familiar. At first, I was puzzled as to why the artist had taken such care to portray these obvious banalities with painstaking exactitude. Then a now familiar feeling overcame me: the obvious turned weird, just a touch past bearing. An art critic quoted in the catalogue must have seen the same dislocation when suggested that the artist worked out of his own experience of estrangement: '...the light is a shade too high-key, the contrasts are too stark. There are intimations of other meanings. Doomsday could take us unaware, catch us short at the moment of our indifference.'

Sometimes, obscure stuffs hiddenly swarm beneath the familiar appearance of things. The feeling that this is happening makes seemingly obvious scenes appear disquietingly queer. I refer to this sensation as the experience of the strangeness of the obvious. I could, like Sartre, call it a nausea taking it to be the idiosyncratic alienation of a particular individual from things whose substance - for him - leaks away. But I refuse to psychologize this feeling, to locate it exclusively inside myself. Rather than a form of neurosis, it is, I believe, a perception. When the experience occurs, it is really 'that out

there' which is the source of the strangeness. When I feel this particular oddness, I feel it in an environment which I perceive as genuinely peculiar.
The experience of the obvious-turned-strange generally happens in an instant and dissipates as soon as sententious phrases weave their web, restoring the familiar appearance of things. The perception of the strangeness of the obvious can be like a fleeting glance through a tiny crack in things - a non-verbal insight into the substantial strangeness of banal stuffs. For me it is also a flash from the unsuspected depths of substance which pains my flesh, awakening me. If things did not sometimes hurt, I would never learn that reality is not a dream. In a poem by Paul Celan, I found an evocation of the unbearable lightness of stuffs — reality perceived as dream.

...and no kind of
peace.

Gray nights, foreknown to be cool.
Stimulus dollops, otter-like,
over consciousness gravel
on their way to
little memory bubbles.

Grey-within-grey of substance.
A half-pain, a second one, with no
lasting trace, half-way
here. A half-desire.
Things in motion, things occupied.

Cameo
of compulsive repetition.[1]

1 Paul Celan: Poems, A bilingual edition, Selected, translated, and introduced by Michael Hamburger, Persea Books, NY. 1980. p.220-221.

Most of the routines which structure my condition as a modern man are compulsive repetitions of experiences which were once unique. There were once people who, for the first time, looked at the landscape through the window of a vehicle. What they then saw was assuredly more exciting than the spectral urban landscapes which flow past the window of my morning bus. Their pristine experience of 'speed' was something quite different from the opacity of my commuting to work. But I think I can explain the difference:

When novel experiences become routines they end up as a sort of daydream. And compulsive repetition makes one numb to the material presence of things. Then the materiality of perceived things can end up in a miasma of indifference. The obviousness of the obvious resembles the surface of a calm sea —something which the web of our certainties easily covers as the nets of fishermen stretch across a quiet bay. But shimmering surfaces can hide threatening depths.

In Nausea, Sartre wrote:

> I was telling myself that the sea belonged to the class of green objects, or that the green was a part of the quality of the sea. Even when I looked at things, I was miles from dreaming that they existed: they looked like scenery to me. I picked them in my hands, they served me as tools, I foresaw their resistance. But all happened on the surface. If anyone had asked me what existence was, I would have answered, in good faith, that it was nothing, simply an empty form which was added to external things without changing anything in their nature. And then, all of a sudden, there it was, clear as day: existence had suddenly unveiled itself. It had lost theharmless look of an abstract category: it was the very paste of things, this root was kneaded into existence. Or rather the root, the park gates, the bench, the sparse grass, all that had

> vanished: the diversity of things, their individuality, were only an appearance, a veneer. This veneer had melted, leaving soft, monstruous masses, all in disorder —naked, in a frightful, obscene nakedness. (p.127)

'Things are divorced from their names.' (ibid 125) ('The Ocean boils with fear', Du Bartas wrote in a comparable vein.)

In the daydream which engulfs compulsory routines, all too normal things can, in an instant, appear to be grinding up strange stuffs beneath the surface. Suddenly, things are no longer as they should be. But generally, all remains quiet. I have seen the process at work in myself. When I am jerked out of my complacency, I quickly reassure myself with commonplace "wisdom" and learned clichés. So, I am inclined to think that, if people were often to perceive the strangeness of the most obvious, new strings of words sewing together old ideas in novel fashions would conceal the disquieting feeling. Words can mend the cracks in the appearances of things, taming the unspeakable strangeness of the obvious.

Conventional wisdom, received ideas, common places, compulsory repeated formulas are the scarred fabric of perception in modern environments. They work to restore the obviousness of the obvious. But I feel that this mending is gradually anaesthetizing me. The restoration of the obvious is purchased at the expense of losing the real. The strangeness of the obvious, when it hits, hits the flesh like a boomerang. The backlash of the negated uniqueness of things perceived in or through the numbness of compulsive repetition whips the senses. I write this essay because I think that the wound, at least, is real.

The genuine perception of stuffs which can be strange, and the certainties that hold these stuffs in a web of obviousness are like two topological manifolds which partially, but not completely coincide. Or better, perhaps, one relates to the

other as the material depth of the sea relates to its visible surface in Sartre's Nausea. In the experience of the obvious-become-strange, I see the materiality of things angry at environments which negate this very materiality. Feelings then dissociate themselves from the words which conventionally describe experience. It is like the news that pain can speak my sorrow.

Though some of my friends tell me that they do not share this experience, I refuse to see my estrangement as a strictly personal quirk. I do not think I have come upon a private eccentricity, but a trait of, perhaps also a threat to, my condition as a modern man. To speak frankly, I think that one somehow deserves to perceive things the way he does. I must take responsibility for my perceptions. And if this is true then I am happy to see things strangely. My estrangement from the obvious is a 'disorder' of feeling and thought which does not call for therapy, but a discipline. It will either crush my judgment or enable me to face real questions: What is out there? What is real and what illusion? What is present which involves me? To what and whom am I present? I have no ready-made concepts to analyze an alienation that I feel like a sore spot in my flesh but nevertheless can cultivate as an entrance into reality. It is not 'something' to look at but a peculiarity of the eye, the grief of unseeing feet, the nose's quest for colors, the yearning of my skin for smells.

I feel that I live within imprisoning envelopes which maintain a homeostasis, a peculiarly modern invention. Yesterday, long ago, when the factory was a symbol of progress and men sang of tomorrow, Marx devised a theory of society which centered on the concept of production. His bottom-line he called 'the metabolism with nature.' For him, nature maintained a majestic permanence, so one could use her as an unchangeable stage on which different 'relations of production' generated various scenes. Only these relations were real, de-

termining the shape of society's fictions: cultures, religions, and ideas about nature (in this sense, 'nature is nothing for man'). Nature was present in the form of the 'laws of nature' and these were interpreted as necessary conditions of the social drama.

In Marx's late attempts to arrive at a 'natural science of man in society', man's 'metabolism with nature' meant that the 'laws of nature' defined the space in which all historical and possible 'relations of production' were confined. Matter, for Marx was the matter of the natural sciences of his day. He never dreamed of the possibility of a 'metabolism with nature' that would transform her very substance. He could not predict air-conditioned 'atmospheres', much less suspect that they would be of a radically different kind —belong to another genus— than the air he breathed. Marx imagined a metabolism with nature as the general frame in which the phenomena of his interest — relations of production —would take place. He could not see that a society's metabolism with nature would be capable of so profoundly affecting the perception of stuffs that one must now say: it shapes matter. Marx's materialism was not radical enough.

When traveling and obliged to sleep in motels, I always think of Marx's 'metabolism with nature.' The motel, the thirty dollars to pay for the room, the fact that I have money in my pocket, my choice of the Warren rather than the Hilton when I stop in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, all may perhaps be explained as expressions of 'production relations.' Yet each hostelry has the power to transform air into a noxious gas. I don't want to breathe that gas. Sometimes, in cheaper motels, I can turn off the gas and open the window!

If I want to speak of a 'metabolism with nature' today, I have to look at things like air-conditioning in a materialistic way. I have to start with the actual situation of my body enclosed within several envelopes which maintain a homeo-

stasis. Begin at home. Think of the warmth of your heated house in winter. You can still lower the thermostat or even turn it off. But think of public buildings, airplanes, hospitals, offices, and factories. Try to imagine what it would mean to turn off the machines. But how to let in some air?

I write with the conviction that our perceptions are also shaped by our power to "turn off". If I can turn off the gas and open the window my space is changed, my perception is radically altered: hot and cold return. The several envelopes and shields which generally determine our metabolism with nature also shape the materiality of our perceived world. Strange dusty stuffs surreptitiously leak out from the envelopes which mediate our experience of nature. Layer after layer, the dust covers everything 'outside' in gray shrouds. They say that nature dies.

I live in a world where nature can die. I also live in a world where my homeostatic comfort is in proportion to my cowardice and where my courage lies in the strength of a powerless estrangement. I must accept that this is a strange world. In this, I have been assisted by a number of historians, philosophers and anthropologists who, independently from one another, but sometimes in conversation, have spoken of the radical strangeness of the modern world. In recent decades, they have raised the question of what they call the specificity of Western modernity. What they have written has helped me to understand my own feelings of estrangement and has moved me to examine the strangeness of the modern world in the light of their questions.

The question of the specificity of modernity has allowed me to break open the paradoxical loop of the 'strangeness of the obvious' by finding a third ground of historical comparisons. When matched against the records of history, most of what modern man considers normal is the exception. Looked at from the past, modernity indeed appears

strange. The one in me who looks at modern obviousness with an estranged eye may be what, in me remains of history. Modern times differ from all other epochs; a unique chasm separates the West from all other cultures. This, succinctly, is the specificity of the modern West. Historians will emphasize modernity, anthropologists the West. In its most abstract form, the question is about a difference — between epochs and cultures —which can be distinguished from all other differences. The modern West differs from anything previously seen in history by a difference which is 'different', specific, unique. Non-Western cultures and pre-modern epochs constitute a mosaic of extremely diversified forms which cannot be reduced to any common denominator. And no matter how open to differences and varieties, that mosaic cannot accommodate the modern West. The latter is not just 'different', it is radically other. The nature of its otherness resists any juxtaposition with other forms. It is not only a distinct configuration, but it is also situated in a topological space of its own. All historical societies differ in their shapes; this society is built from another stuff. From my perspective here, this means that modernity generates a mode of perceiving the materiality of the world which is unprecedented.

Theoretically, the question of modernity's specificity meets with various difficulties. For example, it obliges us to elaborate categories for what we have lost. The history of the West, generally dealt with in terms of progress, discovery and development may come to be viewed as a history of losses. Further, pre-modern epochs and non-Western cultures never acted to develop a commonality of condition which would exist in opposition to us. Therefore, the categories in contrast with which we can grasp our specificity are ideal types. Several authors have already begun to elaborate such categories. Without these categories, modernity can only be defined as the result of acts of breakage.

But on the phenomenological ground of my experience, the question is barely tolerable —it directly and dramatically raises the issue of our radical strangeness. In relation to whom? To the dead and to the others —we are the dead's Other World and the other's strangers. And there is more. If I perceive this strangeness, I become an other to myself. I am split into a performer of routine gestures and an onlooker who can sometimes see the radical strangeness of the gestures. I confess to a feeling of powerless estrangement from the stuffs inherent in my condition of "modern man" - perhaps I am not quite normal. Introspection has shown me how to trick myself: a repertory of commonplace sayings, lessons learned at school, habits acquired at a job help 'normalize' my feelings again.

If I confront the serious and well-documented question of the specificity of the West with my own estrangement, cowardice, and small acts of courage, I may be able to open up the possibility of a disciplined distancing from modes of perception which have become intolerable for me. Through a historical understanding of modern stuffs, the world can, perhaps, acquire weight again.

REMEMBERING ILLICH'S CONVIVIUM*

by Samar Farage

A l'uomo che cavalca lungamente per terreni selvatici viene desiderio d'una città. Finalmente giunge a Isidora. Città dove i palazzi hanno scale a chiocciola incrostate di chiocciole marine, dove si fabbricano a regola d'arte cannocchiali e violini, dove quando il forestiero é incerto tra due donne ne incontra sempre una terza, dove le lotte dei galli degenerano in risse sanguinose tra gli scommettitori. A tutte queste cose egli pensava quando desiderava una città. Isidora é dunque la citta dei suoi sogni: con una differenza. La città sognata conteneva lui giovane: a Isidora arriva in tarda eta. Nella piazza c'é il muretto dei vecchi che guardano passare al gioventù; lui e seduto in fila con loro. I desideri sono già ricordi.
(Calvino: Le città e la memoria)

When a man rides a long time through wild regions he feels the desire for a city. Finally he comes to Isidora, a city where the buildings have spiral staircases encrusted with spiral seashells, where perfect telescopes and violins are made, where the foreigner hesitating between two women always encounters a third, where cockfights degenerate into bloody brawls among the bettors. He was thinking of all these things when he desired a city.

* A slightly different version of this essay was originally delivered in Lucca on 2003 and then published in International Journal of llich Studies under the title *Conversations around the table*, in 2013.

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> Isidora, therefore, is the city of his dreams: with one difference. The dreamed-of city contained him as a young man; he arrives at Isidora in his old age. In the square there is the wall where the old men sit and watch the young go by; he is seated in a row with them. Desires are already memories.

In Florence, during the autumn of 2002, for one hour each day, the voice of Ivan sounded these lines again and again in his effort at teaching me Italian. He believed that memorizing such beautiful lines would lead me to love a language he felt entirely at home in; a language that in its rhythms and silences profoundly resonated his yearnings for the blue waters of the Adriatic, for the green hills dotted with olive trees, the landscape that evoked the atmosphere of his childhood.

Today, many years later, his voice still faintly accompanies these lines from Calvino but his glittering eyes and benevolent smile are not there to forgive me my mistakes. I have attempted to speak Italian with his Italian friends several times not only because I think he would have insisted that my fear not overshadow my respect for his listeners, but also as a homage to his efforts to teach me. I trusted that they would excuse my mistakes. Even though Ivan is no longer here physically, I suspect that for many of those who have known him well, he is somewhere close, laughing gently, his toes dipped in the waters of Lethe that wash memories from the feet of the dead and carries them to the pool of Mnemosyne where poets can find them.

I would like to write about a theme that was fundamental to Illich's life, thought and writings, though one that was not often noted: how to foster and cultivate the ground for friendship, as the ability to face one another in a mutual commitment to the truth. In this short paper, I can only give a glimpse of the importance he placed on friendship; on how

he practiced friendship through conversations around a table.

Illich described his life as a pilgrimage among friends. Reflecting on what mattered most deeply to him, he stated it with surprising simplicity: to pursue disciplined and committed learning with a group of friends who trust one another. It is best to hear him again describing what, I have come to believe, was the central question guiding his work. He asked: "How I can live in the world into which I was born, the world where I experience increasingly that I am caught in a kind of imprisonment? How can I be true to whoever stands before me? How do I keep a space open when I find myself in the face and pupil of the other while the other finds himself in my face and gaze?"

In the light of these questions, his critique of modernity and technology attains a new coherence and clarity: The gift and surprise that is the Other can only wander in when that space is open. The immediacy, intimacy and freedom of my encounter with the other is threatened and even destroyed by what he once called non-convivial tools: for example, by schools that package knowledge and grade people; by diagnoses that prevent the arts of healing and suffering; by professions that impute needs to their clients; by screens that hide you from me. The question of how to be true to the one who stands before me is central because, ethics, in a world without an *ethnos*, can only truly be rooted in my relation to someone and not guided by unquestioned submission to positive laws and abstract norms.

Ivan was able to capture how artifacts deform and distort sensual perceptions in his unique way because he was an old witch. As he said, "I am hedge-straddler, a *zaunreiter* in German, which is an old name for a witch. With one foot I stand on my home ground in the tradition of Catholic philosophy in which more than two dozen generations have prayerfully cultivated a garden into whose trees they carefully graft-

ed pagan Greek and Roman shoots. My other foot, the one dangling on the outside is heavy with mud clots and scented by exotic herbs through which I have trampled." Elsewhere, he introduced himself as a xenocryst, a mineral foreign to the rock in which it is embedded or as an extravagant thinker: from *extra-vagare*, he who walks outside.

Ivan felt estranged in a world where increasingly our feelings and thoughts about others and ourselves are deliberated designed. Estrangement did not lead him to withdraw from the world—but to live in it with courage and clarity. In this modern desert, his search for truth—*philosophia--* was oriented by and in the service of *philia--* friendship. In this, he emulated his master and friend from the 12th century, the philosopher Hugh of St. Victor who had said: "For I was a foreigner and met you in a strange land, but the land was not really strange for I found friends there. I don't know whether I first made friends or was made one, but I found charity there and I loved it; and could not tire of it for it was sweet to me, and I filled my heart with it, and was sad that my heart could hold so little. I could not take in all there was, but I took in as much as I could. I filled up all the space I had but I could not fit in all I found. So I accepted what I could, and weighed down with this precious gift, I did not feel any burden because my full heart sustained me. And now, having made a long journey, I find my heart still warmed, and none of the gift has been lost; for charity never ends."

The question of how to face the other invokes the question of the Good as what is appropriate, fitting and harmonious. This question cannot be answered in schools and universities, which historically have been founded on the separation of sensual and ascetical living from critical intellectual pursuits, of habits of the heart and habits of the mind. In fact, such institutionalized learning is almost the enemy of learning how to live virtuously with the other. It contributes instead to

deepening the sterile and senseless indifference towards the Other and reality. Universities have become cold laboratories where the absolute nature of the Good has been replaced by a relative calculus of positive and negative values. As such, universities have eroded our ability to trust our common sense as our guide for what is most fitting and proportionate, what the Greeks called *mesotes* or middle ground. Common sense, our first organ of judgment, was a physical faculty located in the heart for Aristotle and in the anterior cavity in the head for medieval philosophers. Historically, the common sense or sensus communis was the passage way between the external senses and internal senses. It was the site for the proportionate comingling of the senses before passage to the intellect, a sensual grasping of the world, best expressed in the medieval adage: "*nihil potest esse in intellectu si non fuerat prius in sensu*." With modern philosophy, such wisdom is reversed. Sense perception is doubted, mind and body are separated and people feel what has first been abstractly constructed in thought. The statement ushering modernity is Descartes,' "I think therefore I am." This modern position sums up the disenfleshment and disembodiment that Ivan fought against.

Illich's critique of schools, universities and institutions was hence a critique of their power to hinder our ability to live decently with one another. Early on, he gave "*faute de mieux*" the name "research by people" to the disciplined search for truth outside institutions. He contrasted "research or science for people" conducted in the universities, with "science by people": a type of research that is not sponsored by corporate clients, not published in prestigious academic journals and without much value for the supermarket. Such research done alone or in small groups has a direct bearing on the one who is engaged in it. Such research directly transforms who we are and how we live with one another. It permits a hospitable and convivial conversation. Illich stated

that: 'learned and leisured hospitality is the only antidote to the stance of deadly cleverness that is acquired in the pursuit of objectively secured knowledge." He called it "conversations around a table," for what is better than a table to allow guests and host to face each other generously in a common pursuit?

A table is the occasion for the gathering of friends engaged in serious inquiry on matters that have a direct bearing on how they live, points to how, for Illich, philosophy always implied a way of life, a daily endeavor, a practice of graceful playfulness. Wherever he went a table was set: a host would invite the guests over a threshold to a table where others assembled; to a place that was personal without being private. This open and generous hospitality was symbolized by a candle that stood lit on the table: a flame that stood for a third that could knock at the door. There were no stated rules, but friends partaking the soup ensured that the table was set, dishes were washed, and soup was stretched for the latecomers. This studium was a convivium.

The conversation around the table was unrelenting but disciplined. The rigor demanded by Illich implied an *askesis*, a training into arts of thinking and virtuous living so they become a second nature. It implied the cultivation of a *hexis*, a stance in the world. The *askesis* of friendship also implied rigorous cultivation of habits of the mind in concordance to habits of the heart. He often spoke with the Cappadocian fathers, of *nepsis*, a guarding of the senses from the allurements of images and artifacts in order to purify and sharpen them. For an Aristotelian, all senses converge in the heart. Thus to avoid staining the heart, one should guard the eyes to avoid phantasms of optical make-believe; one should free the sense of smell in order to inhale the other and tune our ears to listen for harmonies in the words of our friend.

Friendship was an ongoing practice that cultivated a mutual trust, respect and commitment. He sometimes made

me smile, with embarrassment, with his simple statement: "Tell me what to do and I will obey you." For us moderns, obedience is a strange concept and harsh burden; for Illich, fidelity between friends demanded obedience to each other. In his conversations with Cayley, he explains: "Obedience in the biblical sense means unobstructed listening, unconditional readiness to hear, and untrammeled disposition to be surprised by the Other's word. …When I submit my heart, my mind and my body I come to be below the other. When I listen unconditionally, respectfully, courageously with the readiness to take in the other as a radical surprise, I do something else. I bow, I bend over the total otherness of someone. But I renounce searching for bridges between the other and me, recognizing the gulf that separates us. Leaning into this chasm makes aware of the depth of my loneliness and able to bear it in the light of the substantial likeness between the other and myself. All that reaches me in the other is his word, which I accept on faith. But by the strength of this word, I now can trust myself to walk on the surface without being engulfed by institutional power…" Ivan was an exemplary model of such complete openness. Anyone who has met him remembers his total presence in both body and mind in his devotion to friends.

Philosophical quest in the company of friends implied a criticism of everything that made life unphilosophical, everything "that castrates and sterilizes the heart and enervates ethical sensibilities." The refinement of the habits of the mind implied first a distancing from certainties of the present, or an estrangement from what is familiar and taken for granted. Such distancing is necessary, Ivan thought, to free oneself from disabling perceptions and beliefs. He used historical studies as a road to gain such distance and often anchored himself in the study of changing word fields: by listening to their sounds and uncovering their historicity, Ivan

shook up the foundations of modern prejudices. He used to say that even verbs have a history: in the age of the car, walking becomes a different activity; in the age of the image, seeing changes; in the age of the screen, reading no longer signifies what it did for the pre-12th century philosopher.

To understand ourselves better by weakening our certainties, Illich recommended a historiography described beautifully by one of his friends, Ludolf Kuchenbuch, as a "like a crab crawling through landscapes of past innocence." When faced by a danger most animals turn around and run away, but the crab crawls backwards while its bulging eyes remain fixed on the object it flees: the recovery of the past necessitates never forgetting the present danger. Historical excursions of this kind were demanded by Illich not only to distance ourselves but also to protect us against excessive sentimentalism and apocalyptic exaggeration. He insisted on a clear-eyed renunciation of fantasies of power to change the world. Instead of feeling responsibility for the world's problems, Illich recommended an attitude of wakeful hope.

I remember his recounting, as a parable, the courage of his friend Helder Camara, a Brazilian priest under the dictatorship, who when asked how he faced the horror of the atrocious acts he had witnessed, replied: "you must never give up. As long as a person is alive, somewhere beneath the ashes there is a bit of remaining fire and our entire task is to blow very carefully…you'll see whether it lights up. You must not worry whether it takes fire again or not. All you have to do is blow." For Illich, all we could often do is to carry a candle in the dark, be a candle in the dark, know that you are a flame in the dark.

Ivan found the word "Peace" to describe or explain what he hoped for and worked towards all his life. He has wonderfully explained this in his text "The Cultivation of Conspiracy," from which I draw freely now. Ivan argued that

each circle of friends engenders its own aura, its atmosphere. Atmosphere is the "smell," the emanation that gives each table, each gathering, its unique and personal quality. Every place has a smell and still in German one can say, "I can smell you well"; or say, "I can suffer you" to his friend. Atmosphere can only emerge when people face each other in trust. After 30 years of reflection and thinking, he found the word *pax* or "peace" to be most suitable for naming this atmosphere or aura created by a circle of friends engaged in joint study oriented by and devoted to mutual commitment and fidelity. In retracing the particular historical nature of the foundation of European communities, he states that peace was never an abstract condition but for each community a specific spirit to be cherished in its uniqueness. This spirit was sealed by the *conspiratio* or *osculum*: the mouth to mouth kiss or sharing of breath by which participants in a community (called the *ecclesia*) shared their breath with one another and their union with one holy spirit. Around 300 BCE, *pax* became a key word in the Christian liturgy, camouflaging the scandalous nature of the *osculum*. The European roots of peace are synonymous with this somatic incorporation of equals into a community.

The atmosphere of Illich's *convivium* was one of *sobria ebrietas*- drunken sobriety: pleasurable study, graceful playfulness, and embodied reading. In this, he followed the advice of his teacher Hugh of St. Victor who stood against hundreds of years of Christian shunning of the flesh and the laughter that might ripple it and encouraged his teaching monks to foster merriment, "for serious matters are absorbed more easily and with more pleasure when mixed with humor." For his friends and for me, the gift of his friendship has been our candle in the dark. Ivan and I did not finish reading Calvino together, but the choice of the path described in the last lines of the book could not have been made clear without him:

L'inferno dei viventi non e qualcosa che sarà; se c'e ne uno, é quello che é gia qui, l'inferno che abitiamo tutti i giorni, che formiamo stando insieme. Due modi ci sono per non soffrirne. Il primo riesce facile a molti: accettare l'inferno e diventarne parte fino al punto di non vederlo piu. Il secondo é rischioso ed esige attenzione e apprendimento continui; cercare e saper riconoscere , chi e cosa, in mezzo all'inferno, non é inferno, e farlo durare e dargli spazio.(Marco polo a Kublay Khan)

The inferno of the living is not something that will be; if there is one, it is what is already here, the inferno where we live every day, that we form by being together. There are two ways to escape suffering it. The first is easy for many: accept the inferno and become such a part of it that you can no longer see it. The second is risky and demands constant vigilance and apprehension: seek and learn to recognize who and what, in the midst of inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space.

Reviews

PRISONERS OF ADDICTION AND ENVY

By Sajay Samuel

Planet of the Humans, *directed by Jeff Gibbs, executive producer: Michael Moore, April 21 2021.*
Zehner, Ozzie. **Green Illusions: the dirty secrets of clean energy and the future of environmentalism**. *Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012, pp.437*

Jeff Gibbs remains the environmentalist he was as a young boy. Early in his *Planet of the Humans*, there is a clip of him tree-sitting in his backyard in Michigan. Why a documentary by an environmentalist should have become the object of a censorship campaign by a group of the most well-known names in the US environmental movement —Josh Fox, Bill McKibben, Naomi Klein —is, on its face, puzzling.

With Michael Moore as executive producer, the film was assured wide distribution and public attention. It was released on April 21 2020, the eve of Earth Day, for free viewing on Moore's YouTube channel. Barely a day later, Josh Fox who made his name for Gasland —a documentary exposing the dangers of fracking for natural gas—led a 'letter of outrage' campaign against all those affiliated with the film. A week after that, in an article for the Nation magazine, he accused Michael Moore and Jeff Gibbs of producing a documentary that was not only 'wildly unscientific, outdated, full of falsehoods, and benefits fossil fuel industry promoters and climate deniers' but also 'an incitement to eco-fascist population controls.' His was one among a slew of articles, blog posts, and opinion pieces that quickly emerged to denounce the documentary.

What accounts for this level of invective among

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Samuel, S. Prisoners of Addiction and Envy. Conspiratio,
Fall 2021, p.149-153.

apparent fellow-travelers? The documentary does show how many in the environmental movement — the Sierra Club, Bill McKibben, Van Jones — receive money from billionaires who stood to profit by promoting renewable energy. The documentary also details the alliance between finance capitalists such as David Blood formerly of Goldman Sachs and politicos such as Al Gore of 'an inconvenient truth' fame, who are pushing to 'green the economy.' Messrs. Blood and Gore, the movie shows, are only the tip of a growing network of industrialists, technologists, venture capitalists, academic entrepreneurs, and yes, environmentalists, who see a multi-trillion-dollar business opportunity in moving from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources. It is this promise and the employment opportunities that go with it that also underwrite the 'Green New Deal' announced by Alexandria-Ocasio Cortez and Bernie Sanders.

If the movie simply showed that the environmental movement was influenced and even captured by money interests, that would not account for the reaction against it. After all, it is as American as apple pie to make a buck, particularly when the cause is good. It must have been something else that caused the critics of the film to agitate enough to have the movie banned from YouTube, which impelled PEN America, in reaction, to condemn these obvious efforts at censorship.

The scientific argument reviewed in the film and more fully explicated in the book *Green Illusions* by Ozzie Zehner is that the transition to and the maintenance of a completely renewable energy grid is both impossible to achieve in any reasonable timeframe and is destructive of the environment. This is not a straw man argument since 'greening the economy' means replacing fossil-fuels with renewable sources of energy to prevent or at least mitigate the effects of climate change. Scientists have contested this or that assertion made in the film. The website of the documentary has a tab titled

'Fact Check Bible' which provides the sources for all the claims made. Much of the criticisms accuse Jeff Gibbs of using old data, of understating the efficiencies of renewable energy sources such as solar panels or of overstating the proportion of renewable energy derived from biomass and biofuels.[1]

None of these criticisms, as far as I can tell, address the central issue: is it feasible to completely transition to a renewable energy grid and will that prevent climate change? The work of Mark Jacobson, an academic engineer at Stanford, is at the center of the claim that it is feasible to fully transition to an energy grid composed only of wind, water, and solar power. His work does not reflect settled science and has been repeatedly challenged by other scientists, including some who have argued that Jacobsons' 'work used invalid modeling tools, contained modeling errors, and made implausible and inadequately supported assumptions.'[2]

Debate is endemic to the thing called science despite the uncritical use of such phrases as 'follow the science' or 'science says.' The big picture is often missed during a point and counterpoint debate. Total energy consumed in the US has risen by about 24 percent between 1990 and 2019, the year before the pandemic. Most of the energy produced is wasted, which, in 2019 for example, was about 67.5 percent of the energy generated. The increase in the amount of energy wasted between 2008 and 2019 was more than all the renewable energy added during that period. Over thirty years since 1990, the proportion of renewable energy sources to the to-

1 Those interested in exploring the nuances of the brouhaha surrounding the documentary and attempts to censor it should consult a detailed investigative report published online by the journalist Max Blumenthal.

2 A whiff of the current scientific disputes over renewables can be had by consulting papers on the topic of '100% renewable electricity systems' published in recent issues of Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews, Energy Policy, and Sustainable Cities & Society, among other scholarly publications.

tal generated increased from 4 percent to about 11.5 percent. That renewables can increase to 100 percent in the next thirty years seems very unlikely, though debatable. Furthermore, that such a fully renewable grid can be had without extensive further damage to the environment —through extensive mining for minerals like cobalt, using fossil fueled energy to build wind turbines and blades, and so on — seems incredible, though again a matter for debate. Nonetheless, disputes over such scientific questions seem hardly sufficient to justify the kind of vehement reaction the film has elicited. Dissenters and doubters can simply discuss the relevant scientific research instead of calling for censorship.

A clue about what is driving the reaction of environmentalists is found in the accusation of racism and eco-fascism levelled against the film and its producers. The accusation is mounted in response to the observation made in the documentary, that the ongoing environmental crises cannot be solved while current levels of economic growth and consumption persist. Nowhere in the documentary is the phrase 'population control' used. Yet that is precisely what is read into it. And by expanding on what is not mentioned in the film, its critics remove from consideration any questioning of how we live today. What seems impossible for most of the critics to comprehend and to accept is the main point of the documentary and the book. It is growth in economic production and consumption, particularly in advanced industrial economies, that has been and continues to be the primary cause of climate change. Jeff Gibbs calls on his viewers, including the environmentalists he castigates, to be fully aware of this central truth.

To be aware of something is not simply to know it, as when one knows it is windy outside. Awareness implies action. When Bill McKibben promotes the production and sale of a Tesla instead of a Toyota, he is unaware that con-

tinued economic growth is the primary cause of the ongoing destruction of soils, airs, and waters. He and others who share his opinion fiddle while the world burns, mostly in places far away from the metropole. This is why Jeff Gibbs concludes '… there is a way out of this. We humans must accept that infinite growth on a finite planet is suicide…'

I briefly met Jeff Gibbs when he presented the documentary in State College and had time for a few remarks. I don't recall bringing up Ivan Illich in that exchange. Nothing I have read since, including Zehner's book, suggest either of them know Illich's work. Half a century ago, Illich insisted that 'political debate must now be focused on the various ways in which unlimited production threatens human life' because 'the environmental crisis…is rendered superficial if it is not pointed out that antipollution devices can only be effective if the total output of production decreases.'

The environmentalist movement and their capitalist and post-capitalist fellow travelers are committed to 'greening the economy.' To be committed to greening the economy is to be addicted to the trappings of a consumer society. And as Illich acerbically noted, 'in a consumer society, there are inevitably two kinds of slaves: the prisoners of addiction and the prisoners of envy.' That is why *Tools for Conviviality* is barely comprehensible today and stands as a witness to the road not taken.

Translations

THE NEED FOR A COMMON ROOF (THE SOCIAL CONTROL OF TECHNOLOGY)*

By Valentina Borremans and Ivan Illich

Translation by Gustavo Esteva and Rebecca Gamez

The social control of the systems of production is the basis for any social restructuring: the new phase in which technology has entered allows and demands a new determination of such control. 1) The social ownership of the means of production; 2) The social control of the mechanisms of distribution, and 3) the community agreement on the self-limitation of some technological dimensions, but only taken together do they constitute the basis for the social control of production in a society.

In the early phases of industrialization, the first two aspects seemed so important that they did not allow thinking on the third to develop sufficiently. In our opinion, what is needed today is political control of the technological characteristics of industrial products and of the intensity of professional services.

This new politics consists of the search for community agreement on the technological profile of a common roof under which all the members of a society want to live, rather than in the construction of a launchpad from which only a few members of that society are sent to the stars.

This new politics is a voluntary and communitarian self-limitation, the search to maximize institutional productivity and the consumption of goods and services limited by the needs considered to be satisfactory for each individual within that community.

* From: Apéndice: "La necesidad de un techo común (el control social de la tecnología)," por Valentina Borremans e Iván Illich, Obras reunidas I, México: FCE, 2006 (1971).

Borremans, V. Illich, I. The Need for a Common Roof (the social control of technology).
Conspiratio, Fall 2021, p.157-160.

The social control of the mode of production acquires a wider meaning in the current era of technological development. In the first phases of industrialization, for good reason, attention had to concentrate on the ownership of the means of production and on the equitable distribution of products.

In the phase that we have experienced since the sixties, the most important political goal should be the social definition of a maximum in relation to some basic characteristics of the products of a society.

The economic elites of Latin American societies have already incorporated in their world vision what we will call the "technological imperative." We call "technological imperative" the idea that if any technological achievement is possible anywhere in the world, it should be realized and put in the service of some men no matter the price that other members of the society must pay for it.

Capitalist societies justify planning under the "technological imperative" slogan by the apparent demand of a few consumers who want to move at supersonic speeds. Socialist societies justify this same planning by the supposed service to the entire community derived from the possibility that a few could move at such a velocity.

Any society that accepts the "technological imperative" will place the quality and quantity of goods and services produced in service of indefinite progress, thereby destroying the base in order to achieve the construction of socialism.

This inevitably leads to the control of society by "expert technocrats" (professionals, specialists, scientists, etc.) regardless of the fact that they have been selected to serve the powerful by a political party or by a group of capitalists.

We consider Crypto-Stalinism to reside precisely in this: in appropriating social control of the means of production to justify centralized control over the distribution of goods, in the service of the unlimited increase in production.

We believe that at this moment conditions exist to mobilize the majority of some Latin American and African peoples to consciously reject domination by technocrats, an inevitable consequence of the popular acceptance of the "technological imperative." Once people have accepted (it does not matter to what degree) that it is worth the trouble to send a man to the moon, or keep someone alive for more than hundred years, or to take trips at supersonic speeds, they will easily accept any other form of exploitation, because the idol in whose name the exploitation takes place has been created by a scientist.

The rejection of the "technological imperative" is the basis to initiate the search for the technological dimensions that would have to be subject to popular judgment so that the majority determines the maximum limits under which it wants to live.

For example:

What is the maximum speed limit for the transport of people that allows the optimum use of public resources to guarantee optimum mobility to the largest majority?

What maximum amplitude of the electronic spectrum used for communication between people guarantees the optimum level of communication among those of the majority?

How much public resources must be used to prolong the life of an adult, when such expenses discriminate against the great majority that require health prevention and maintenance or assistance in moments of acute crisis?

What possible pedagogical methods must be rejected in favor of the majority's access to the means of self-formation and self-knowledge?

The idea that a people democratically decides the technological dimensions within which it voluntarily limits itself to live, within a certain sphere, and not only provisionally but rather in the long term, is profoundly contrary to the

way of thinking that prevails today.

It is improbable that the initiative to put this problem forward will be taken up in Western or Eastern European countries that find themselves well on the road to industrialization.

In super-capitalist countries where environmental pollution makes the Earth incapable of sustaining human life and the super-determination of the individual makes them impotent to survive outside an artificial environment, a small minority is already conscious of the need to urgently think about limiting production.

We believe that the leadership of a global movement towards a new popular politics in which the people, above all, decide the maximum limits in which that society should live, and then make them accessible to all, should come from some countries of Latin America, Africa, and possibly China.

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